



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 119th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 171

WASHINGTON, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2025

No. 187

Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the Honorable JAMES C. JUSTICE, a Senator from the State of West Virginia.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Listen to our prayers, Almighty God, and hurry to provide us with Your wisdom. Inspire us to trust You, for You are our mighty rock and fortress.

Lord, lead and guide our lawmakers, enabling them to honor Your Name as they follow Your leading. Protect them from the hidden traps that derail freedom, as they seek to reopen our government. Show Yourself strong, even when they wander from Your plan. Empower our Senators to trust You, seek Your wisdom, and obey Your precepts.

We pray in Your matchless Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, November 7, 2025.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JAMES C. JUSTICE, a Senator from the

State of West Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. JUSTICE thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS ACT, 2026—Motion to Proceed

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 168, H.R. 5371.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 168, H.R. 5371, a bill making continuing appropriations

and extensions for fiscal year 2026, and for other purposes.

Mr. BARRASSO. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER
The majority leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the junior Senator from Connecticut certainly believes in saying the quiet part out loud.

This is what he said:

I think there will be some pretty substantial damage done to a Democratic brand that has been rehabilitated, if on the heels of an election in which the people told us to keep fighting, we immediately stop fighting.

He said that on a podcast yesterday. He went on to say:

The 2026 election is just 12 months away. And if we surrender without having gotten anything, and we cause a lot of folks in this country who had started to believe in the Democratic Party to retreat again, I worry that it will be hard to sort of get them back up off the mat in time for next fall's election cycle.

Let me repeat that.

This is what he said:

I worry that it will be hard to sort of get them back up off the mat in time for next fall's election cycle.

Let that sink in for a minute.

I don't think it is a secret to anybody that Democrats shut down the government for political reasons. There has been plenty of news coverage of the incredible pressure their far-left base has been exerting, but in case anyone was still under the impression that Democrats were driving this shutdown toward its 40th day out of concern for the

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

S7969

American people, well, the junior Democrat from Connecticut pretty handily dispelled that notion.

Again, this is what he said:

I worry that it will be hard to sort of get them back up off the mat in time for next fall's election cycle.

Just in case anyone needed any additional testimony, Axios reported on Wednesday:

A set of post-election talking points circulated among Democratic congressional offices warned: "Caving without concessions would sap Democrats' momentum and undercut the party's support from its base." . . . "Democrats throwing [Republicans] a rope in exchange for nothing would be political self-sabotage," it added.

"Political self-sabotage."

Now, there are two very striking things about these quotes. One, of course, is the focus not on the American people but on how to ensure Democrats win the next election. Two is the fact that progressive Democrats apparently want to keep this shutdown going forever.

We are on day 38 of Democrats' shutdown—day 38. Federal workers have gone more than a month now without pay. They don't know how they are going to pay their mortgages or buy food, thanks to Democrats. A lot of them are supposed to get another paycheck today. Instead, they will see a deposit of exactly zero dollars in their bank accounts. And that is just the tip of the iceberg.

Head Start preschools have closed. Veterans programs have shuttered. Many Medicare recipients can't get access to telehealth. National Guard troops aren't training. SNAP benefits are in profound jeopardy. There are people going hungry right now because Democrats refuse to agree to a clean, nonpartisan funding extension.

Of course, then there is air travel. Because of staffing shortages caused by Democrats' shutdown, the Department of Transportation had to issue a mandatory reduction in air travel beginning today. Hundreds of thousands of people will be affected every day, to say nothing of disruptions to the movement of packages and goods. But nothing seems to move Democrats—noting—not hungry Americans, not massive disruptions to our economy—noting.

If I were a Democrat, I would be embarrassed—I mean, flatout embarrassed—to walk into this building every day; to walk past the men and women of the Capitol Police, who are not getting paid thanks to Democrats; to walk past junior staffers, many of whom are, undoubtedly, frantic, by this point, as they wonder how they are going to pay their rent and continue to buy food.

How can Democrats look any of these people in the eyes?

And please don't tell me they are fighting for some greater good for the American people. If Democrats can be said to be fighting for anyone at all besides themselves, they are fighting for

a fraction of a fraction, for a tiny percentage of a small percentage of Americans who are on ObamaCare. The number of people they are supposedly fighting for is dwarfed—and I say dwarfed—by the number of people whose lives and livelihoods they are damaging.

And as for the claim that Democrats got some kind of mandate from the American people, on Tuesday, to continue jeopardizing food stamps for 40 million Americans in need, give me a break. Democrats performed well in three States where Democrats often perform well.

Congratulations.

I really don't think that means that the American people have all signed up to be democratic socialists, and it sure as heck doesn't provide a good reason for making 40 million Americans go hungry.

I would like to think that the junior Senator from Connecticut doesn't represent all Senate Democrats, but if there are Senate Democrats out there who do still care about hard-working Americans and not just Democrats' election prospects, the time to act is now, not when the far left decides this exercise can be over, not when Federal workers are lining up at food banks for their Thanksgiving meals—now, today. I hope—I hope—there are at least five more Democrats out there with a backbone who will vote with us to reopen the government and end these weeks of misery for the American people.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, today is November 7, 2025. We are now 1 month and 7 days into the longest shutdown in the history of the American Government.

Democrats can stand here and claim they have broken the record, but for what? For leverage? For politics?

Meanwhile, in every State in this Union, the American people are getting hurt. They don't seem to care one bit.

Soldiers are working without pay at Fort Bragg in Georgia. Where are the two Democrat Senators from Georgia?

A single mom in Michigan is struggling to put food on the table for her children. Where are the two Democrat Senators from Michigan?

Capitol Police officers and staff members on this very floor in this very building are struggling to pay their bills. Do the Democrat Senators care about any of them? The government is still closed. They are not getting paid.

Each and every one of these people is being hurt by the Schumer shutdown—every one of them—and every day, it gets worse for them. Yet Senator SCHU-

MER bragged to the press—bragged to them. He said:

Every day gets better for us.

I am wondering who "us" is. Certainly not the American people. Certainly not the people whose flights were grounded today all across the country.

You know, to keep our airlines and to keep our skies safe, the FAA directed airlines to reduce the number of flights. It is the right thing to do. This has impacted airports all across this country. That is the impact of what the Democrats are doing by keeping this government shut.

The FAA Administrator—someone with 35 years of experience in the field—said:

We're in [all] new territory.

Never seen anything like this before.

And here is what really should terrify the American people: It is one Democrat staffer who said Democrats won't open the government until planes fall out of the sky. Can you believe that? Let that sink in. Democrats are waiting for a disaster, and in the process, they are gambling with American lives.

Senator CHRIS MURPHY of Connecticut, a Democrat with Presidential ambitions based on his scheduling and his speeches—he admitted it on the record. He said in an interview just yesterday with Punchbowl News—Senator MURPHY said that reopening the government would do, he said, "substantial damage" to the Democrats' "brand." There you have it. Bad for the brand: a functioning government.

The Democrat brand means more to them than 42 million hungry Americans. The Democrat brand means more to them than military families who aren't getting paid. The Democrat brand means more to them than safety in the skies.

Let's call what we are seeing with the Democrat shutdown what it is. It is cruel, and it is heartless.

Now, let's be fair. Even some Democrats now recognize that it is cruel and heartless. They are starting to turn on each other. One Democrat staffer admitted to the press that the far-left Democrats in their caucus have no plan to ever end the shutdown—none, zero. They want to keep it going forever. The staffer even admitted the far-left Democrats are hurting people, and they are doing it for political gain. This is the direct quote from the Democrat staff member, Senate staff: "[F]amilies who can afford it the least . . . are . . . getting walloped" every day the shutdown continues.

Mr. President, the Democrats can and should end the shutdown today. Republicans have a clean, bipartisan continuing resolution at the desk to reopen the government. We want to pair this with three full-time appropriations bills. These are bills that have already passed the Senate with bipartisan support. They have been negotiated on a bipartisan basis with the

House—progress. We need to get it done.

These bills would fully fund veterans' care. They would fully fund our Capitol Police. They would fully fund food assistance in America, such as the SNAP and the WIC Programs. This is a very reasonable deal, a reasonable proposal—a deal that Democrats earlier this week asked Republicans to put onto the floor. And if it passes, the Schumer shutdown will end quickly. Mr. President, 13,000 air traffic controllers would get paid, 50,000 TSA agents would get paid, 1.3 million military members would be paid, food assistance for 42 million Americans would be fully funded, flights would get restored, and the government would reopen.

Some Senate Democrats have signaled they will still vote no—no. Evidently, they want the pain; they want the pressure. As Members of this body, as well as the Democrat whip, said to the press on television—she said they want “leverage” to continue so they can score political points.

Let me be clear about what a “no” vote means. A “no” vote is a vote to refuse to pay air traffic controllers who are working, refuse to pay TSA agents who have been working for the last 37 days, refuse to pay members of the military who continue to defend us and are serving us all around the world, refuse to pay Capitol Police officers who are here in this very building and that the Democratic Senators walk by each and every time they come into this Chamber. A “no” vote is a vote to cut more flights and to cause more chaos for families hoping to travel over Thanksgiving. A “no” vote is a vote to deny food to 42 million hungry Americans. A “no” vote means Democrats continue to play their dangerous game of the politics of pain.

There is no excuse—none—for voting no. Don't tell me “I want leverage,” which is what the Democrats have been saying. The American people are not leverage. They are not pawns. When Democrats treat American people as political pawns, the American people lose. And I don't want to hear them say “I stand on principle.” What are the principles when you allow 42 million Americans to continue to go hungry?

The American people are watching. They are watching to see who is fighting for them and who is simply using them as leverage.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I have one word for my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and on my side of the aisle—one word: enough.

It is time for us to get down to the business of agreeing on some basic things. I think we can.

The first thing we need to do is to agree to reopen the Government of the United States of America. I believe we should do it before the sun sets today at 5:02 p.m. and 39 seconds.

The second thing we should agree on is to protect the families who are fac-

ing outrageous increases in health insurance premiums across the United States. If we cannot address the Affordable Care Act and make dramatic changes, we need to legislate for that to happen. And that rarely ever happens around here, but it should. That should be part of our agreement.

The third thing is that we need to support a bipartisan appropriations process to fund our government. We are lucky; we have two leaders on the Appropriations Committee—one a Republican, SUSAN COLLINS, and another a Democrat, PATTY MURRAY—who are competent and able to achieve that goal. It is time for us to get rid of the never-ending continuing resolutions and actually appropriate money for purposes that the public sent us here to honor.

The fourth thing is that we need to collectively apologize and pay in full all Federal employees and contractors as soon as possible. It is an embarrassment to come to work each day and realize that these wonderful people who are working with us—doing their job and doing it well and professionally—are not being paid.

Finally, we need to pass legislation to guarantee that this, the longest shutdown in U.S. history, is the last time Congress ever should be showing political resolve at the expense of food on the table for hungry children.

It is time for us to act. Enough.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MOODY). The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Madam President, this is the first time I have spoken on the floor about the government shutdown. Like a lot of people, I have been hoping we could find a way forward and sort of stop the disruption and madness that it is causing throughout the country.

I want to say to my colleagues who have been working together to find a solution to open up the government: I really appreciate your efforts very, very much.

I know, in this polarized environment, it is hard to reach across the aisle, but this moment dictates that we try. I have had some discussions, and I know a lot of my colleagues—Senators BRITT and COLLINS and many others—have spent a lot of time—MARKWAYNE MULLIN—trying to find common ground to open up the government so we can move forward and have a debate about healthcare and maybe find a solution—apparently to no avail.

There is a group of my Democratic colleagues who believe that “every day gets better for us.” That is Senator SCHUMER. They, I guess, apparently feel emboldened by the election.

The question I have for the country: Is every day getting better for you?

If you are trying to get to an airport or fly somewhere, I would say not so much. If you are a government employee working and not getting paid, not so much. There are a lot of services

that are being disrupted out there because the government is shut down.

The truth of the matter is both parties have had government shutdowns trying to get a policy win. One time we shut the government down, as Republicans, to get money to build the wall. We eventually got the money to build the wall because it was a very good idea, but it didn't happen through the shutdown. So I learned that shutting the government down trying to get a policy win is probably not good government.

Our Democrat friends, whatever day it is, they are shutting your government down—our government down—to try to make Republicans do something on healthcare we are just not going to do. They are trying to repeal elements of the working families tax cut, the Big Beautiful Bill—whatever you want to call it—that would prohibit healthcare funding going to illegal immigrants.

They are trying to repeal many of the things that we think are just good reforms—over a trillion dollars—pulling back a trillion and a half dollars to go into programs we think are not good investments. Investing in a program where illegal immigrants can get free healthcare just gives you more illegal immigration.

One of the things that we are trying to deal with is that Medicaid has grown 50 percent in the last 5 years, and we are trying to put it on a more sustainable path.

Helping rural hospitals—they want to take the provision out of the bill that would give \$50 billion to rural hospitals to help with Medicaid reform. So we are just not going to do that. That is never going to happen, nor should it.

So what do we do next?

I think the first thing we need to do is understanding that the statement “Every day gets better for us” is a lie—“us” being the United States. Every day that this thing drags on is bad for America. It is dangerous for America. It is dangerous to our national security—the people in the FBI and the CIA that have to work, no matter whether they get paid, simply to protect our Nation. So this madness really needs to end.

I think there are plenty of people over here that try to go forward and have a debate on healthcare and maybe find common ground, but not this way. The one thing I learned, in my time up here, is that taking hostages—political hostage-taking—shouldn't be overly rewarded. Political terrorism should never be rewarded.

And what you are doing over there by not finding a way forward is you are terrorizing the country for your own political benefit. You really are. You are engaging in political terrorism. You are making it hard for people to do things they need to do and have to do. You are making it hard for people to get services they need because of your political desire to beat us.

Well, I will tell you what; that needs to stop. So to my leadership here, you

all have done a great job—Senator THUNE particularly—by saying: We will talk, but we have got to open up the government first. I really appreciate what Senator THUNE has done in that regard.

But I want my colleagues to know, the longer this goes and the more people you hurt and the more you try to extract from your political hostage-taking, the less votes you are going to get from us, starting with me.

I am not going to give in to this. We are not going to reward people who do this. I understand trying to find common ground and getting something to give something. But you have gone way too far, and you are hurting way too many people, and you are asking for things that are really absurd.

So don't think you are going to open up the government with a handful of Democratic votes if this continues. You are going to need much more than that because you are going to lose me. I am not going to play this game any longer. This is bad for the country. And if we do it now, it will never end.

So, Senator SCHUMER, I couldn't disagree with you more. "Every day gets better for us." You clearly need to get out of Washington and talk to people outside the wacky left. You are disconnected with real life in America. Every day this goes on doesn't get better for us.

What are you asking us to do? You are demanding that we increase spending by a trillion and a half dollars from savings we obtained from the working families tax cut bill. We are not going to do that.

But the main thing that is driving this debate is a desire by Democrats to continue a program called ObamaCare that is not well designed. It is costing way too much. It is not delivering for the American people.

We are not going to do that.

Senator WELCH, a good friend, noted yesterday that the Affordable Care Act hasn't lived up to that billing, and there are things we can do on healthcare to lower costs to make life more affordable. But my statement is that the Affordable Care Act is unaffordable, and we are not going to reauthorize it because you demand we do so, because it makes no sense to keep throwing good money into this program.

Now, President Obama told us back in 2010, if we pass the Affordable Care Act—which is the "Unaffordable Care Act"—families would have a \$2,500-a-year decrease in their premiums for healthcare.

Well, that has turned out to be a big flop.

Healthcare premiums have gone up 100 percent from 2013 to 2019. So the Affordable Care Act is anything but, and they are asking for \$350 billion over a decade to keep these subsidies in place that they chose to do in a partisan way.

They are due to expire. If they were that great, why did you let them ex-

pire? The bottom line is, you are trying to hold us hostage as Republicans, making us invest in a program that is just not a good deal for America. No matter what you call it or how you want to sell it, you are selling a bad product, and that product needs to be discontinued as it exists today.

Who is the biggest winner of the Affordable Care Act? Not consumers. A dramatic increase in premiums—we didn't lower premiums by \$2,500 per family. They have gone up 100 percent in just a matter of years.

Now you are wanting to continue subsidies that create subsidies for the ObamaCare that nobody in the private sector has. The average person in America is paying about 25 percent of their premium that works for a company.

What they are trying to do is have most people pay nothing and allow people making up to hundreds of thousands of dollars to get subsidies for their healthcare. We just can't afford that.

Senator KLOBUCHAR talked about a husband and wife that retired early from a union job that had a combined income of \$130-some thousand, and that their premiums will go up. Well, the question is this: Do we need to be subsidizing premiums for people that make \$130-some thousand that have defined benefit plans plus Social Security?

The question becomes: What makes sense? What can we afford? What is the best way we can help the American people?

I will tell you the best way to help the American people is to stop the madness when it comes to ObamaCare.

What has happened since the passage of this bill?

Let me tell you what has happened. Healthcare companies—insurance companies in the healthcare space—have had their stock go up since 2010 by over 1,000 percent.

Now, what you want us to do is continue these subsidies that go to insurance companies that drive up the cost of healthcare. We are not going to do it. We are going to try to find a better way to use the money to give it to consumers so they can buy healthcare of their own choosing to create competition that doesn't exist to get the better healthcare outcome and save some money in the process.

So Democrats are insisting that Republicans continue the practice of taking your hard-earned tax dollars and making healthcare insurance companies incredibly, filthy rich.

Look at this chart. This is the S&P 500. These are different companies in the space. But the main healthcare companies that benefit from ObamaCare have seen their stock increase by 1,000 percent, with no end in sight.

UnitedHealthcare, 1,177 percent increase in stock; Cigna, 822 percent; 414 percent; Humana, 490 percent—they need to up their game. M-O-L-I-N-A—

whoever they are—859 percent; C-E-N-T-E-N-E, 604 percent; Aetna, 595 percent—since the passage of this bill.

We are not, as Republicans, going to continue what you created, a windfall for health insurance companies, inflationary mechanisms in healthcare without an end.

We are going to stop and fix what you created in 2010, which is an out-of-control, inflationary approach to healthcare that rewards insurance companies over anybody else.

You told a big lie to the American people when you passed this bill—that their premiums would go down by \$2,500 per family. They have gone up 100 percent.

We are going to stop the madness. We are going to come out with a proposal that will have a different outcome than this. We are going to come out with a proposal that allows this money to go to people to make better choices for them to create competition that doesn't exist. And the big loser will be the insurance companies. The big winner will be the consumer. And President Trump stands ready to work with you on the other side to get an outcome we can all live with.

We cannot live with this, folks. We cannot live with ObamaCare and these subsidies as designed because they are creating runaway inflation in healthcare. They are rewarding the biggest healthcare companies in the country at the expense of the taxpayer.

We are going to break this cycle. Now, how long will that take? I don't know. But I know this: I am not going to be forced to continue this wasteful, inefficient program called ObamaCare because you tell me I have to, to open the government. I will not.

And we will have an election one of these days, and we will see how this plays out over time. We will see what the American people want. Do they want to continue throwing money at insurance companies like this, with increased costs to the taxpayers and people that participate in this program? Or would they like something new and different that would break the endless reward to healthcare companies and start rewarding consumers to get better outcomes in lowering their premiums?

We will have a debate about that one day. We will have an election, probably, over that. But what we are not going to do is be held hostage for you to get your way, for me to vote to authorize a program that is failing, that was a lie. And I am going to do what I can to fix this.

And if you want to continue to shut down the government, holding me and others hostage to continue this garbage, we are not going to do it. We will be rewarding the worst possible behavior in politics. You will just get more of this.

So here is my advice to my Democratic colleagues: Work with people who are trying to find a way forward to reopen the government, to have a conversation about how better to deliver

affordable healthcare, working in a bipartisan manner, and we will get to where we need to go as a country.

We will not give in to political terrorism and hostage-taking. Your desire to keep the government shut down is terrorizing Americans. Americans are losing vital services. Their lives have been turned upside down because you care more about continuing a terrible program than you do them. We are not going to give in.

I promise you I will work with you to get a better outcome. I promise you I will vote no to your political hostage-taking, and let the chips fall where they may. You are overplaying your hand. You are doing a lot of damage to good people that just want a better life and some certainty in their life.

I try to work with you when I can on the other side. Sometimes we argue, and I try to argue effectively. But I will not be part of this process any longer. You are destroying the lives of Americans for a political desire that is unreasonable.

You are asking me and others to continue a program that is fundamentally broken, that is inflationary. And the only winner of ObamaCare are the largest healthcare companies in America that are making excessive profits off a healthcare system you designed, and all you want is more people signed up on this program. And you are rewarding the insurance companies for finding more people who are making a fortune. And the delivery of healthcare is costing more, and the quality is going down.

We are not going to do this. We are not going to give in to this. So my approach is a nightmare for the healthcare insurance companies.

Our approach will be the biggest loser will be healthcare insurance companies. The biggest winner will be consumers who will have choices they don't have, to date, and money they can have that they don't have, to date, to buy a better product. That is what this is about. The insistence of the Democratic Party to excessively reward healthcare insurance companies who are doing their bidding to sign up people on government healthcare that is inefficient and is not working.

You don't care it is inefficient and not working. You just want more people, and you are using the insurance companies in the healthcare space as your agents, as your proxies, and they are willingly doing your bidding.

To the insurance companies in the healthcare space, your days are numbered when it comes to this crap.

To my Democratic colleagues, you want a debate on healthcare, let it begin right now. Look what you are doing with taxpayer dollars. You are not relieving the cost of healthcare to working people, you are increasing their premiums. You are making healthcare more inflationary, and the only people that really are winning big are healthcare insurance companies who are willingly playing this game. And they will never stop.

Why would they? Why would a healthcare insurance company turn their back on this program when they are making a killing?

Well, I don't know what is going to happen or when it is going to happen, but I know this: I will never vote to continue this madness. If you are insisting that I have to continue this program, I will not. I owe it to the people of South Carolina and the country to break this cycle.

We owe it to the people of America to open up our government and have a logical discussion about making healthcare more affordable and breaking the cycle of runaway inflation.

You are on a course that is going to disrupt American people's lives to get an outcome that is terrible for the country, which is continuing ObamaCare the way it is constructed. You will not be successful.

I will make sure there are enough Republicans over here to say no to your plan to hold us hostage and continue to terrorize this country. You have gone too far.

If I were you, Senator SCHUMER, I would rethink because I am telling you, every day is not getting better for you because every day is getting worse for the people in this country who interact with the government, who travel, who are working and not getting paid. It is getting worse for them, and you are demanding something of me and others that we will not give in to. We will not be held hostage to continue ObamaCare that has been a miserable failure.

We will not be held hostage to continue to give money to healthcare companies, insurance companies, to enrich them at the expense of the American people.

So I don't know when it ends or how it ends, but I know what the outcome will be with my vote. We are going to break the cycle of rewarding healthcare insurance companies at the expense of the consumer. We are going to stop this madness with my vote.

I hope we can find a way forward, but that way forward will not include what is going on today. So I will be voting no to the idea that we will continue these subsidies—rewarding healthcare insurance companies insane amounts, driving up premium costs, and getting bad outcomes—to open up the government. I reject that, and I will vote no to that. And the demands you are making grow every day. You are overplaying your hand, and you are hurting people. Stop it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. HUSTED. Madam President, as you well know, I am the new guy here. In the past, I watched government shutdowns from afar. They never made sense to me. And now I am seeing one up close, and I can confirm that government shutdowns are senseless. And this one seems to be one of the most senseless ones of all.

But what is it about? Why, for 38 days, would the government be shut down? Well, I know this, on day one, I sat in this Chamber, listened to the majority leader JOHN THUNE explain to our Democrat colleagues: Open the government, and we will negotiate on any priorities you want to discuss.

So that has been, those have been the ground rules from day one. It sounded fair to me. It seems like that is a fair way to do it, but, apparently, that was not good enough for my Democrat colleagues. Some of them said that the shutdown was necessary to provide leverage to get the policies they wanted to, and they needed to stand up to President Trump.

Well, congratulations. Congratulations for setting the record for the longest government shutdown in American history. Hope you are proud.

But it came at an enormously expensive price, very, very high price, and who is paying that high price? It came at the expense of your constituents, that is who. That is who is paying the price for the government shutdown.

And the reality is this, though. President Trump was elected, overwhelmingly, by the majority of Americans just a year ago. He will be in office for 3 more years. I know that for many of my colleagues, they don't like that prospect, but that is reality. That is how we do this in America, we elect Presidents every 4 years, and he was elected, overwhelmingly, by the American people.

So I certainly hope, in standing up to him, you do not intend to keep the government shut down for 3 more years, for the process that you are using to gain leverage through your record-long government shutdown is at the price of the American people. They are the ones that are suffering from this, not the people in this Chamber—the American people.

They are the collateral damage for your leverage. That is who is paying the price for the political gain. And who are the they? Who are the "they" that are paying this price?

Well, they are SNAP beneficiaries who don't know if they will be able to afford food. They are the TSA agents and air traffic controllers who are missing paychecks, some of them having to take other jobs. Probably some of them will soon need to resign because they won't be getting a paycheck, and they will need to find some way to put food on the table.

And what is the result of that? Flights being canceled. It is disrupting lives of American people all around the country. That is the price of trying to gain leverage. Congratulations.

The Capitol Police that protect this place and all of you, they are part of paying the price for this. They are going unpaid while they still remain on the job. The staff in this Chamber, the staff that serves all of you to keep the floor open, to keep the clocks running on time, they pay the price. They are going without pay.

I talked to a small business owner the other day who can't get their loan from the SBA. Small business owners are paying the price. And when they pay the price, so do their employees. In my own State of Ohio, 8,000 civilian employees were furloughed from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the people that protect our country. They are paying the price for your leverage. These are real people, not bargaining chips.

They have real jobs. They have important things they do to serve our country. They are not bargaining chips for your political leverage.

Republicans have voted time and time again to reopen government, cleanly, responsibly, and without games—the same thing that we asked you to do. I have voted 14 times. My colleagues and I on this side of the aisle have voted 14 times to reopen the government. It is not unprecedented to pass a clean CR to reopen the government. In fact, during the Biden administration, when Republicans didn't run this Chamber, they compromised with Democrats and voted 13 times to pass a clean CR to keep the government open, the same thing we have asked you to do 14 times, and you said no.

There is a way forward right now though. We can pass a funding bill today—today—get workers paid, keep America running, and then pair it with the firm commitment that has been given to debate and vote on the policies that divide us.

That is how grownups govern, by the way. That is how grownups are supposed to do this. We don't always get our way. We debate it; we fight for our values; and we vote. And sometimes we win, and sometimes we lose. That is what the majority leader of this body, JOHN THUNE, who is a man of his word, has said he would do.

My Democrat colleagues say they don't want to give up their leverage in funding government until all of their demands are met. But let's be abundantly clear, it is not Republicans. It is not Republicans that you are hurting with this strategy. It is the American people, the American taxpayer, the American taxpayer that is paying for a government that is not serving them. They are the ones. They are the ones that your strategy is hurting.

And I say this with all sincerity. I want to offer a perspective because, yes, I am fired up about this. I am frustrated by it. I think it is wrong, but I want to fix it. So I want to offer this perspective.

If leverage was your goal, you got as much leverage now as you are ever going to get. It is never going to get better than this. The shutdown has lasted 38 days. Do you really think you will have more leverage after 48 days or 58 days? You won't.

It is just a matter of how much more suffering you will cause until it comes to an end. When will enough be enough? How much suffering must occur before you decide to vote with us to open up the government?

I am not asking you to abandon your principles. I would never do that. Everybody here stands on their principles. They argue. They fight for what they want. I would never ask you to abandon your principles.

If you want to defend Biden's COVID-19 era bonuses that prop up a broken ObamaCare system, then keep fighting, if that is what you believe. It is not working.

You can propose your own legislation—which I would prefer that you propose some bipartisan legislation that the majority leader of this Chamber, I believe, will take up to vote. It is time for you to take yes for an answer to work with us to solve these problems.

I wasn't here, neither was the Presiding Officer, when all the ObamaCare legislation was passed, nor was I here when the Democrats voted to set an expiration date of 2025 for the subsidies that they now say they want to renew. They set the expiration date.

But I am here now. I want to fix it. I want to get some results. But those policies, those ObamaCare policies, have contributed to increasing healthcare costs that are the biggest driver of inflation in the 21st century.

Look at this chart. This is the cost of consumer goods, services, that have increased from 2000 to 2024. Hospital service is No. 1, medical services on this chart. Healthcare inflation is the most dramatic form of inflation that this Nation has experienced in the 21st century, and it is due to ObamaCare policies.

Those are the facts, and that is the reality. I didn't create the problem. Many people in this Chamber didn't create the problem. But I want to help solve the problem. I want to reduce the cost of healthcare.

When the government shutdown ends, I am happy to be one of the people that works on solving the problem that others created. We want to fix this. We want people to be able to afford healthcare, but the way we do that is to drive down the costs.

I want to work with anyone in this Chamber that will change that, to eliminate the fraud that has filled up this ACA system, to target the benefits to those who truly need them, and to create an insurance market that doesn't rely on endless taxpayer subsidies—create something that works, reduce the cost of providing healthcare in this country.

And I say this: For the love of God and country, stop making the American people suffer while we wait to do this. Bring it to an end. Open the government.

Let's work together to reduce the cost of healthcare and make it more affordable, because the truth is, you have no more leverage today than you did on day one. In fact, you have less, because there is less time to negotiate the items you claim to care about. There is less time today to negotiate it than when this all started.

So it is a matter of urgency. Let's get this done. Let's get the government open, and let's get to work.

It is the longest government shutdown in American history. We can't change what happened in the past 38 days, but we can change the future. We can end this today. Right now, today, we can end this. Let's get back to work.

The American people expect their leaders to solve problems, not to stage them, not to create them, which is what has happened during this government shutdown. It is long past time to reopen the government, to restore trust, and to prove that the Senators in this Chamber can lead. That is the question that needs to be resolved, and it needs to be resolved today. It is time to reopen the government.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

EXPRESSING CONDEMNATION OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY'S PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITY GROUPS

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I rise today to speak about a grave matter and a clear violation of religious freedom, human dignity, and the rule of law.

In China, Christians are fighting daily for their religious freedom against the Chinese Communist Party. And on October 10, 2025, the Chinese Communist Party launched the largest coordinated nationwide crackdown in more than four decades against a Christian urban house church in China.

In that sweep, 23 pastors and church members of the Zion Church, one of China's largest underground congregations, were arrested and wrongfully detained, including Pastor Ezra Jin.

Pastor Jin and the members of the Zion Church were not engaged in violence. They were worshiping. They were serving God. And for that action, they are being treated as enemies of the communist state.

Last week, I introduced a bipartisan, bicameral resolution to condemn the abduction of Pastor Jin and the Zion Church leaders and to demand their immediate release. This resolution is designed to pressure Chinese leadership to release the congregation members and to let them practice their Christian faith freely. It sends a message that faith is not a crime, and a government that fears its citizens' faith is nothing more than an oppressive tyranny.

Pastor Jin's daughter and her husband Bill, a native Houstonian, wrote about the CCP's persecution in the Washington Post this past week. In their column, they made a piercing observation, and I want to share it here in full:

There were few more obvious ways to showcase the bankruptcy of an ideology—and the vitality of the Christian faith—than by forcing peaceful believers to suffer for the sake of their convictions.

This is a profound truth. China, like other communist regimes before it, utterly despises the fact that there is and always has been a higher authority than the state itself. In its effort to bring every aspect of society under brutal government control, the CCP uses state power to drive fear into the hearts of its citizens. History has shown that these tactics will fail, and the persecuted church will only grow stronger.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that God gave us not a spirit of fear but of power and of love. I know that that same spirit—one of power and of love—is what the church in China is fighting with.

I urge my colleagues to join me in passing this resolution unanimously to show our support for Pastor Jin, his family, and his fellow believers, and to show the world that the United States stands on the side of freedom, on the side of faith, and we stand with the persecuted Christians in China.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Foreign Relations Committee be discharged from further consideration and the Senate now proceed to S. Res. 463.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 463) expressing condemnation of the Chinese Communist Party's persecution of religious minority groups, including Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists and the detention of Pastor "Ezra" Jin Mingri and leaders of the Zion Church, and reaffirming the United States' global commitment to promote religious freedom and tolerance.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged and the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. CRUZ. I ask unanimous consent that the Cruz substitute amendment to the resolution be considered and agreed to.

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

The amendment, in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to as follows:

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Strike all after the resolving clause and insert the following:

That the Senate—

(1) strongly condemns the Chinese Communist Party's persecution of religious minority groups, including Pastor "Ezra" Jin Mingri and other leaders and members of Zion Church and other faith communities;

(2) reaffirms the commitment of the United States to promote religious freedom and tolerance around the world and to help provide protection and relief to religious minorities facing persecution and violence;

(3) calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all detained members of Zion Church, including Pastor Jin, and all other wrongfully detained religious practitioners in China;

(4) calls for the Government of the People's Republic of China to cease its harassment and intimidation of the relatives of Zion Church members and their relatives, including tactics of transnational repression overseas;

(5) calls on the Government of the People's Republic of China to release all other arbi-

trarily detained religious believers, including Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and other Christians; and

(6) demands that the Government of the People's Republic of China—

(A) respect the internationally recognized human right to freedom of religion or belief; and

(B) end all forms of violence and discrimination against religious minority groups and entities.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I know of no further debate on the resolution, as amended.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

Hearing no further debate, the question is on adoption of the resolution, as amended.

The resolution (S. Res. 463), as amended, was agreed to.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Cruz substitute amendment to the preamble be agreed to; that the preamble, as amended, be agreed to; and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The amendment to the preamble, in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to as follows:

(Purpose: To amend the preamble)

Strike the preamble and insert the following:

Whereas, on October 10, 2025, international news outlets reported that the Chinese Communist Party (referred to in this preamble as the "CCP") detained Pastor "Ezra" Jin Mingri, who is the founder of Zion Church, from his home in Guangxi Province, China;

Whereas CCP authorities also arrested nearly 30 other pastors and church members from Zion Church;

Whereas 23 members of Zion Church remain in detention centers, while other members have been released on bail, and still others are being harassed and intimidated by Chinese authorities;

Whereas the CCP's actions mark the largest coordinated, nationwide crackdown against an unregistered Christian house church network in more than 40 years;

Whereas thousands of Zion Church members and millions of Christians and other religious adherents who reside in the People's Republic of China seek to peacefully worship God and care for their neighbors without the threat or fear of persecution;

Whereas the imprisonment of Pastor Jin is the latest instance of CCP persecution of a large number of religious minorities, including Christians, Muslim Uyghurs, Hui Muslims, and Tibetan Buddhists;

Whereas, since coming to power in 2012, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has escalated a campaign to "sinicize" religion in China by—

(1) allowing authorities to burn bibles, imprison believers, and tear down Christian crosses; and

(2) forcing religious organizations and adherents to conform to the ideology of the CCP;

Whereas, under the policy of sinicizing religion, the Government of China has—

(1) ordered the removal of crosses from Catholic and Protestant churches;

(2) censored religious texts;

(3) imposed CCP-approved religious materials;

(4) replaced images of Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary with pictures of Xi Jinping; and

(5) instructed clergy to preach CCP ideology;

Whereas, in 2021, the Trump administration determined the CCP—

(1) had committed crimes against humanity and genocide against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups, including ethnic Kazakhs and ethnic Kyrgyz; and

(2) has continued to subject religious minority groups in China to restrictions on religious practices and freedom of expression, arbitrary imprisonment, forced sterilization torture, and forced labor;

Whereas the CCP has made consistent efforts to erode the religious, linguistic, and cultural identity of Tibetans, including by—

(1) closing Buddhist monasteries and limiting entry or practitioners;

(2) forcibly disappearing and arbitrarily detaining Tibetans for practicing their religious beliefs;

(3) censoring religious content online; and

(4) expanding the use of boarding schools to indoctrinate children in CCP-approved curricula and Mandarin Chinese;

Whereas Congress unanimously passed the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-292), which established, as the official policy of the United States—

(1) to condemn violations of religious freedom;

(2) to promote, and assist other governments in the promotion of, the fundamental right to freedom of religion;

(3) to stand for liberty and with the persecuted;

(4) to use and implement appropriate tools in the United States foreign policy apparatus, including diplomatic, political, commercial, charitable, educational, and cultural channels; and

(5) to promote respect for religious freedom by all governments and peoples;

Whereas, under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has designated the People's Republic of China as a "country of particular concern for religious freedom" every year since 1999;

Whereas Congress unanimously passed the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (Public Law 114-281) in 2016 to enhance the capabilities of the United States to advance religious liberty globally through diplomacy, training, counterterrorism, and foreign assistance;

Whereas the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (subtitle F of title XII of Public Law 114-328), enacted by Congress in 2016, gives the President the authority to impose targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for committing human rights violations;

Whereas the People's Republic of China is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in Paris on December 10, 1948, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in New York on December 19, 1966, which recognize freedom of religion as an internationally-recognized human right;

Whereas Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China explicitly states that citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief; and

Whereas the United States must show strong international leadership when it comes to the advancement of religious freedoms, liberties, and protections: Now, therefore, be it

The preamble, as amended, was agreed to.

The resolution, as amended, with its preamble, as amended, reads as follows:

S. RES. 463

Whereas, on October 10, 2025, international news outlets reported that the Chinese Communist Party (referred to in this preamble as the “CCP”) detained Pastor “Ezra” Jin Mingri, who is the founder of Zion Church, from his home in Guangxi Province, China;

Whereas CCP authorities also arrested nearly 30 other pastors and church members from Zion Church;

Whereas 23 members of Zion Church remain in detention centers, while other members have been released on bail, and still others are being harassed and intimidated by Chinese authorities;

Whereas the CCP’s actions mark the largest coordinated, nationwide crackdown against an unregistered Christian house church network in more than 40 years;

Whereas thousands of Zion Church members and millions of Christians and other religious adherents who reside in the People’s Republic of China seek to peacefully worship God and care for their neighbors without the threat or fear of persecution;

Whereas the imprisonment of Pastor Jin is the latest instance of CCP persecution of a large number of religious minorities, including Christians, Muslim Uyghurs, Hui Muslims, and Tibetan Buddhists;

Whereas, since coming to power in 2012, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has escalated a campaign to “sinicize” religion in China by—

(1) allowing authorities to burn bibles, imprison believers, and tear down Christian crosses; and

(2) forcing religious organizations and adherents to conform to the ideology of the CCP;

Whereas, under the policy of sinicizing religion, the Government of China has—

(1) ordered the removal of crosses from Catholic and Protestant churches;

(2) censored religious texts;

(3) imposed CCP-approved religious materials;

(4) replaced images of Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary with pictures of Xi Jinping; and

(5) instructed clergy to preach CCP ideology;

Whereas, in 2021, the Trump administration determined the CCP—

(1) had committed crimes against humanity and genocide against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups, including ethnic Kazakhs and ethnic Kyrgyz; and

(2) has continued to subject religious minority groups in China to restrictions on religious practices and freedom of expression, arbitrary imprisonment, forced sterilization, torture, and forced labor;

Whereas the CCP has made consistent efforts to erode the religious, linguistic, and cultural identity of Tibetans, including by—

(1) closing Buddhist monasteries and limiting entry or practitioners;

(2) forcibly disappearing and arbitrarily detaining Tibetans for practicing their religious beliefs;

(3) censoring religious content online; and

(4) expanding the use of boarding schools to indoctrinate children in CCP-approved curricula and Mandarin Chinese;

Whereas Congress unanimously passed the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-292), which established, as the official policy of the United States—

(1) to condemn violations of religious freedom;

(2) to promote, and assist other governments in the promotion of, the fundamental right to freedom of religion;

(3) to stand for liberty and with the persecuted;

(4) to use and implement appropriate tools in the United States foreign policy appa-

ratus, including diplomatic, political, commercial, charitable, educational, and cultural channels; and

(5) to promote respect for religious freedom by all governments and peoples;

Whereas, under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has designated the People’s Republic of China as a “country of particular concern for religious freedom” every year since 1999;

Whereas Congress unanimously passed the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (Public Law 114-281) in 2016 to enhance the capabilities of the United States to advance religious liberty globally through diplomacy, training, counterterrorism, and foreign assistance;

Whereas the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (subtitle F of title XII of Public Law 114-328), enacted by Congress in 2016, gives the President the authority to impose targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for committing human rights violations;

Whereas the People’s Republic of China is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in Paris on December 10, 1948, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in New York on December 19, 1966, which recognize freedom of religion as an internationally-recognized human right;

Whereas Article 36 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China explicitly states that citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief; and

Whereas the United States must show strong international leadership when it comes to the advancement of religious freedoms, liberties, and protections: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) strongly condemns the Chinese Communist Party’s persecution of religious minority groups, including Pastor “Ezra” Jin Mingri and other leaders and members of Zion Church and other faith communities;

(2) reaffirms the commitment of the United States to promote religious freedom and tolerance around the world and to help provide protection and relief to religious minorities facing persecution and violence;

(3) calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all detained members of Zion Church, including Pastor Jin, and all other wrongfully detained religious practitioners in China;

(4) calls for the Government of the People’s Republic of China to cease its harassment and intimidation of the relatives of Zion Church members and their relatives, including tactics of transnational repression overseas;

(5) calls on the Government of the People’s Republic of China to release all other arbitrarily detained religious believers, including Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and other Christians; and

(6) demands that the Government of the People’s Republic of China—

(A) respect the internationally recognized human right to freedom of religion or belief; and

(B) end all forms of violence and discrimination against religious minority groups and entities.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

MEDAL OF HONOR ACT

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I rise today to honor a very special group of Americans—the soldiers, the sailors,

the marines, and the airmen who have fought bravely for this Nation, but who have received the very highest distinction that any member of the Armed Forces can earn, the Medal of Honor.

Since 1863, Presidents of the United States have awarded the Medal of Honor to more than 3,500 of the bravest men and women ever to wear the uniform of this Nation. Each one has demonstrated valor, gallantry, and heroism above and beyond the call of duty, with acts so selfless, so extraordinary that they stand as beacons of courage for future generations.

In 1960, Congress passed Public Law 6556, establishing the Army and Navy Medal of Honor Roll and entitling each Medal of Honor recipient to a modest special pension of \$10 per month for life.

Over time, that monthly amount has gradually increased from \$10 to \$100, to what stands today at approximately \$1,400 per month.

But let’s pause and think about that: \$1,400 a month for those who risked everything—their safety, their future, their very lives for freedom, for the opportunity for all of us to be here today.

Today, there are 61 living Medal of Honor recipients, 61 men who faced unthinkable odds, who put their country before themselves so that the rest of us could live in peace. We cannot truly ever repay them. There is no sum, there is no medal, there are no words that can measure up to their sacrifice. But there are ways that we can continue to honor them, by ensuring that they are cared for, respected, and supported.

In January of this year, I introduced the Medals Act, my legislation to raise the monthly pension for Medal of Honor recipients. This legislation is a way for this Nation to say: We see you, we remember you, and we will not forget what you have done.

Many of these heroes spend their time traveling the country, speaking to schoolchildren, visiting military hospitals, and strengthening the very fabric of America.

This monetary increase will allow them to continue those efforts and to reach more communities, mentor more veterans, and remind all of us about the cost of freedom.

And I would like to take a moment to recognize nine Medal of Honor recipients who currently live in the Lone Star State. We honor them, and we cherish them.

I would also like to recognize the 139 Medal of Honor recipients who were either born in, entered the service from, or died in Texas. These are America’s heroes, and they are heroes for the great State of Texas.

Now, I would like to take a moment to recognize the Medal of Honor recipients here in the Gallery: LTC William Swenson and COL Paris Davis.

In just a moment, I will propound a unanimous consent request to take up and pass H.R. 695, the House-passed version of the Medal Act that passed

the House 424 to 0. I urge my colleagues to join me, as our companions in the House have already done, in supporting this measure, in passing it into law, in sending it directly to the President's desk to be signed into law, and showing that, when it comes to honoring our Nation's very greatest heroes, we are united, and we speak with one voice.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 695, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 695) to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the rate of the special pension payable to Medal of Honor recipients, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. CRUZ. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (H.R. 695) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. CRUZ. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS ACT, 2026—Motion to Proceed

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, 2 weeks ago, I came to the floor in support of a bill that we were going to vote on, a motion to proceed called the Shutdown Fairness Act. It is a pretty simple bill. The name pretty well describes exactly what it is. It is trying to be fair during these dysfunctional shutdowns. Any of the Federal workers who are forced to work because they are in our military, they are in Federal law enforcement, they are TSA, or they are air traffic controllers—they are keeping this Nation and Americans safe—if we are going to force them to work, at a minimum, let's make sure we pay them and pay them on time.

I came down in as nonpartisan a manner as I possibly could and literally begged the other side to just join us, vote to proceed to the bill.

They had some objections to it, things that I was willing to address. For example, my bill only addressed workers that were forced to work. They wanted to include furloughed

workers. I said on the floor: I am happy to add that as an amendment. I think, working with my conference, I can get the conference to support it as well.

It wasn't quite that easy, but in the end, we overcame objections within our conference to adding furloughed workers.

So we have completely amended the bill now. We have added furloughed workers.

In the meantime, surprising to me, we had Federal employee worker unions reach out to us, asking what they could do to help pass this bill. They are sick and tired of being used as pawns in this political dysfunction here. They are tired of it.

One of the things that definitely appealed to them once I added the furloughed workers was that my bill makes it permanent. My bill says: We will never use you again as a pawn in the political gamesmanship that is being played out right now.

I am happy to report that the Shutdown Fairness Act, as I now amended it by adding furloughed workers, is supported by the American Federation of Government Employees, the Federal Managers Association, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association.

We tragically had a plane go down early in the week. I am not saying it is because of air traffic control, but we understand the danger. We have to understand the risks we are taking in not paying air traffic controllers so we can fully man our air towers and keep our airspace safe.

The International Association of Fire Fighters supports my bill. The Association of Flight Attendants does.

Again, one of the main reasons they support my bill is, in addition to the fact that we added furloughed workers, my bill makes this permanent.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 191, S. 3012. I further ask that the Johnson substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I just want to first start off and say that I deeply appreciate that Senator JOHNSON has updated his proposal to pay all Federal employees during the shutdown, to include furloughed workers as well as DC employees. I appreciate all his efforts.

I have worked on a number of bills with the Senator from Wisconsin. We would like to continue to work on this bill as well as we go forward. But, unfortunately, I still have some concerns about the way that the bill has been drafted so far. Those are things that I think we can work out and want to

work out. We have been going back and forth with our staff.

I am concerned that Senator JOHNSON's bill still leaves too much discretion up to President Trump. There is too much wiggle room for the administration to basically pick and choose which Federal employees are paid and when.

I am also deeply concerned that this would allow the administration to actually transfer this money to other purposes that are unintended by Congress, which, unfortunately, we have seen happen repeatedly in this administration.

I believe there are ways that we can put in guardrails. There are ways we can get to that, but we are just not there yet. I certainly ask indulgence from my colleague from Wisconsin. We sent another proposal over to his staff. We can work on this quickly and try to figure out how we get there.

In the meantime, I have also introduced a bill that would pay Federal employees just for this shutdown, without the additional powers sent to the administration. It is basically a clean bill—no additional language, no complications, no wondering, what does this actually mean? It is very straightforward.

My Military and Federal Employee Protection Act would ensure that all Federal employees receive the pay they certainly deserve, allowing them to pay their bills on time this month.

I have asked Senator JOHNSON to support my very simple proposal, which I think accomplishes most everything he wants to do, with the exception of things about giving the administration more power. I think we can agree on that. We can pay our troops and our Federal employees, period. That would be my goal.

I will continue to work to this end and to work to end this government shutdown and address the healthcare crisis, but in the meantime, we must protect our hard-working Federal employees.

My bill is very straightforward. We could agree to that right now, and it is done. Federal employees are going to get paid without all the other extraneous language in the Senator's bill.

Therefore, I ask that the Senator modify his request so that, instead, the Appropriations Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 3043 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator from Wisconsin so modify his request?

Mr. JOHNSON. Reserving the right to object, it is important that the American public understand what is going on here.

Again, I came down here 2 weeks ago. I modified my bill quite dramatically. We entered talks immediately with the

Senator from Delaware and the Senator from Michigan. Within those talks—again, 2 weeks ago—they were accusing my bill of giving the President all this additional authority. In discussions staff to staff, they admitted there is no additional authority I am giving to the President in this bill whatsoever.

This bill is completely silent on Presidential authority in terms of who he can furlough. As a matter of fact, everybody is included, every employee is now included. There is no discretion whatsoever in terms of who is furloughed, who gets brought back to work, who gets paid. They all get paid. The Senator from Michigan is well aware of this.

Those discussions, I would say, petered out within a few days. I don't know if they are emboldened; just digging their heels in they are going to continue this shutdown; don't feel they are getting blamed for it; don't have much pressure on them.

Here we are 2 weeks later, and they want to redline the bill. Well, in that 2 weeks, we have had our bill examined exhaustively by our leadership, by OMB, by the unions. Our bill is in a really good place right now. We tried to think of everything. No Federal employee would be excluded from this.

The Senator from Michigan says my bill allows the President to pick and choose. That is total hogwash. Again, every Federal employee, including contractors, gets paid. There is no picking and choosing. That is completely false. Money transfers? What is he talking about? More power? There is no power. It is completely silent in terms of Presidential authority. These are false arguments.

This is further evidence of the gamesmanship the Democrats are playing with people's lives. They are the party of Big Government. They have, in effect, taken a family member hostage.

I see our leader on the floor here. He has been doing everything he possibly can to help Democrats release their own hostage, open up the government.

Once you do that, we are more than happy to talk to you about how do we repair the damage done by ObamaCare and transition to a system that works.

But they are playing politics. They are using Federal employees and, quite honestly, the American public right now, whose flights are being delayed, whose skies are less safe—they are using public employees and the American public as pawns in this grotesque display of partisanship.

My bill is very simple. It is backed by the public sector unions, which generally don't support things I am putting forward.

If the Senator insists on objecting to this, preventing these people, these workers, these people who keep us safe, from getting paid in this round, my guess is that we will take a vote on this to proceed to the bill. The problem with that is it will take much more time.

If we can pass this by unanimous consent right now, we could send it over to the House. The Speaker has already indicated that if we pass the Shutdown Fairness Act, he will bring his people back. They are on 48-hour call. We could have this passed by Monday. Our skies would be safer again. Federal employees would be treated fairly. They would be paid. And they will never ever be used as pawns in this kind of grotesque partisan gamesmanship.

So I will not modify my request.

Mr. THUNE. Will the Senator from Wisconsin yield?

Mr. JOHNSON. Absolutely.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I am trying to understand what is going on here. Perhaps the Senator from Michigan can clarify.

So every public sector employees' union is supporting the Senator from Wisconsin's bill, but you are objecting because you think it grants too much power to the President. Now, if that is—I don't know how every public sector employees' union would be in support of this bill.

My understanding is that the modification proposed by the Senator from Michigan would essentially cover backpay but wouldn't do anything to address it going forward. In other words, we are going to keep Federal employees hostage. So they might get paid for backpay, but starting tomorrow, they are not going to get paid again, and that means that in the future, they will continue to be pawns, they will continue to be held hostage.

This is a straightforward approach that addresses that issue and everybody in this Chamber who isn't getting paid.

I can't believe people come down here and look these people in the eye when he is saying right here: We will pay them not only for today but for tomorrow and for the entire year, and we won't allow them to be held hostage and be pawns in a political game in the future.

My understanding is that the Senator from Michigan, on behalf of, I suppose, other Democrats, is objecting to that.

Please, please help me understand. This is a straightforward proposal which addresses the concern that millions of Americans have who are heading to food banks and can't pay their rent, and you are coming down here and saying you are going to object because you just want to pay them for yesterday, not for tomorrow or for the next day after that?

It is about leverage, isn't it? Isn't that what you all have been saying—it is about leverage? This isn't leverage; this is the lives of the American people.

The Senator from Wisconsin has put forward a straightforward proposal to pay people—Federal employees—today, tomorrow, and in the future. And what you are essentially saying: Well, I am fine with paying them for yesterday,

but we are not going to pay them for tomorrow or the day after that or for the future, and we don't seem to care that there are men and women in uniform who are frequenting food banks, who are not making rent payments, or who are trying to borrow to get by, because it is leverage.

So I would hope—we are going to vote on this. So the Senator from Michigan can object to the unanimous consent request the Senator from Wisconsin made, but everybody in this Chamber is going to be put on the record as to whether or not they want to pay Federal employees not yesterday but today and tomorrow and into the future.

I am tired of political games. I really am. So feel free to object to something that—I don't know how anybody in their right mind could walk into this Chamber, look these people in the eye, and say: We are not going to pay you.

So we are going to vote on it. You can object to it right now, but everybody in this Chamber is going to vote on whether or not they want to pay Federal employees—something that every single public employees' union has said they support.

I yield to the Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. In reclaiming my time briefly, let me emphasize the fact that if you pass this now—again, to the Senator from Michigan, I am literally begging him: Do not object. Do not object. It is still going to take a couple of days to actually pass this. If we have to go the route of a motion to proceed and getting on the bill, that is going to take quite some time. Our skies can't remain at this level right now. We can't continue with these airport delays. We can't continue to use public sector employees and the American public as pawns in this partisan gamesmanship.

So, literally, I think the Senator knows me. He knows I am saying this in good faith: Please do not object. Let this bill pass so the House can come back, and the President can sign this into law, and these good people who are being forced to work or who have been furloughed can get the pay they deserve. Again, today, tomorrow, and in the future, they will be assured they will never ever be used like pawns in these partisan games.

Again, I underscore that I will not modify my request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard to the modification.

Is there an objection to the original request?

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, to the Senator from Wisconsin, I know he and I have worked on a lot of issues. That is not in question here. We do have questions with some of the language in this bill just to make sure that we have guardrails.

I want to pay Federal employees. That is why I have the bill that is on the floor right now that I am trying to

move. It will pay Federal employees. It will pay contractors as well. The Senator's is not doing that, I understand. But everybody who is being shorted right now should be paid, and that is what my legislation does. So we could do that.

You know, I am happy if the Senator wants to take my legislation and put his name on it. I will support it, and we will pass it right now and send it there, and people are going to get paid. So if the Senator really wants to do that, we could do that today.

Does the Senator want me just to put his name on this bill and then we will pass it? It would be fine to do that.

Mr. JOHNSON. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. PETERS. Excuse me.

In reclaiming my time, we can make that happen, and if the Senator puts it on the floor later, we will go through the process. I would hope that he and I, during that process, can work on language to perhaps address some of the concerns that I have. It is not that we pay people. That is not my concern. I wouldn't be offering this legislation here today if I were concerned about that. I want to pay them. Labor unions support my bill too—no surprise. They are getting paid. And that is why I have introduced this.

This is not a political game. I hope we get this shutdown open. I hope we are able to find common ground and say that we want to lower the cost so Americans have affordable healthcare, and we don't want to see their premiums go up and people lose insurance. I hope we can do that. It is not a game. I don't see this as leverage.

Now, a President who refuses to release SNAP funds to feed people—now, that is what is irresponsible and reprehensible leverage. Money is available to feed people right now, and this President is saying no. The court has ordered him to put that money into food, and he says: I am going to appeal it.

That is absolutely despicable, that the President of the United States wants to starve children in order to get his way.

We have to move beyond that. We have to find common ground. I hope we can find common ground in this bill. My bill is just plain, simple, clean, no games, no other language. We know we have to have guardrails when we have a lawless President. We had better put some guardrails in. He walks over Congress all the time. My colleagues on the Republican side just let him walk over Congress all the time.

I don't know why you ran for office if you just want to be run over by a President. We are a coequal branch of government. We are here to represent the people of our States. So let's work together and be thoughtful about this and understand that if Congress puts this law forward, it actually goes the way we want, and we don't have a President who basically thumbs his nose at Members of the Senate and the

House and does what he wants, and he knows the Republicans will say: Oh, well. That is fine. We are just here to rubberstamp. That is what we are here for.

So let's hope we can work together to get this right and pay employees. They should be. They have a right to that. I think we can do this, and we can get together and get beyond the rhetoric and games from the leader, that I heard. It is also on this side as well.

So let's work together. Let's open up this government. Let's end this shutdown. Let's make sure people have affordable healthcare in this country. Let's make sure our own employees get paid. Let's do all of that this weekend. I am on board for all of that. Hopefully, we can get that done.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection to the original request?

Objection is heard.

The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Again, let me correct—I hate to say—falsehoods that were presented here in the Chamber.

My bill is completely silent in terms of Presidential authority.

To the Senator from Michigan, I know they want to put language in there to restrict Presidential authority, but the fact of the matter is—and I made him well aware of this—that it is a bill that would never be signed into law.

So if the Senator is serious about actually paying the workers, he will recognize that fact and admit that my bill is completely silent. It does not add and it does not detract from Presidential authority. There is nothing in the bill that does that.

Secondly, we have tried to come to accommodations with a number of Senators on the other side for a couple of weeks, but they have pretty much fallen on deaf ears.

Again, I know it is unfortunate that he objected right now. If we proceed and vote and actually get on the bill—and I hope, at least, we do that—that will take quite some time. So it seems he has already objected.

What I am happy to do—not happy; I am very disappointed I am going to have to do this—is to look at their language. If it is acceptable—again, if he is doing anything with Presidential authority in the way of adding or detracting, it won't be signed into law; it will be a fruitless exercise. But if we accept their language—we will look at it, and then maybe—maybe—we can come back down here and do another unanimous consent request and pass this today. That is what I hope we can do.

So we will look at the language. It is very unfortunate we didn't pass it right now, but maybe later this afternoon, we can do so.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I appreciate that my colleagues from Wisconsin and Michigan are striving to find a path to make sure that folks are

paid. Folks who are working should be paid, and folks who are furloughed should be paid. But here is the problem with the proposal from my colleague from Wisconsin, and that is, we have a President right now who is violating the Constitution.

Every time you hear the President of the United States say “Hey, I am ending that program because it is not in alignment with my priorities” or a Cabinet member say “We are going to kill those grants because they are not in alignment with the President's priorities,” what you are hearing is an authoritarian statement in violation of the Constitution.

So, in recognition, we have an out-of-control tyrant in the Oval Office who is violating the Constitution. We have a responsibility right here to defend the Constitution, and that is exactly why my colleague from Michigan put those protections into the bill. If you have a President who chooses what programs are funded and not, that is an authoritarian country, and that is what we have right now.

The whole vision of our Nation was founded on these Senators and these House Members coming from different districts and different States, with different life experiences and different geographic interests, and bringing them to forge a consensus or forge a vision of how to address the challenges in every part of our Nation, not to have one person down Pennsylvania Avenue who knows a little bit about New York and a little bit about Florida and who has a certain one point of view be a tyrant.

Martial law would be empowered by the proposal from Wisconsin, and that is why my colleague from Michigan was absolutely right to ensure we here in the Senate defend the Constitution.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, after I finish my remarks, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be recognized for up to 5 minutes each: PETERS, BALDWIN, KELLY, and WELCH.

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I will be brief. After so many failed votes, it is clear we need to try something different. What the Senate is doing isn't working for either party and isn't working for the American people.

Democrats have said we must address the healthcare crisis, but Republicans have repeatedly said they won't negotiate to lower the healthcare costs until the government reopens. So let's find a path to honor both positions.

Democrats would like to see an end to this shutdown, and we want to respect Leader THUNE's desire not to negotiate on the ACA until after the government reopens. Therefore, we would like to offer a simple proposal that

would reopen the government and extend the ACA premium tax credits simultaneously and then have the opportunity to start negotiating longer term solutions to healthcare costs. Let's do all three.

I have spoken with my caucus, and Democrats are offering a very simple compromise. Democrats are ready to clear the way to quickly pass a government funding bill that includes healthcare affordability. Leader THUNE just needs to add a clean 1-year extension of the ACA tax credits to the CR so that we can immediately address rising healthcare costs. That is not a negotiation. It is an extension of current law, something we do all the time around here, as we all know.

But we also offer this: Let's create a bipartisan committee on reforms that will continue negotiations after the government reopens, ahead of next year's enrollment period, to provide long-term certainty that healthcare costs will be more affordable.

This proposal reopens the government and ensures working families who are shopping right now for their healthcare get certainty and financial relief. While open enrollment has begun, insurers can update their rates after we pass a simple extension of the tax credits.

With this approach, we do not negotiate healthcare in the shutdown, as Leader THUNE has maintained he wishes, and the American people get the tax credit extension they want. That is what many of our Republican colleagues have floated over the last 6 weeks as a compromise: a 1-year tax credit extension and reforms to the credits beyond that.

We will agree with the Republican request not to start negotiations until after the government reopens. All Republicans have to do is say yes to extend current law for 1 year. It makes sense. And since what we are proposing is only a simple extension of current law, the Senate could do this within a few hours. This is a reasonable offer that reopens the government, deals with healthcare affordability, and begins a process of negotiating reforms to the ACA tax credits for the future.

Now, the ball is in the Republicans' court. We need Republicans to just say yes.

I yield to Senator PETERS.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, Republicans have repeatedly said that they will not negotiate reforms to the healthcare law credits until the government reopens.

I will tell you right now that all my colleagues on this side of the aisle definitely want to open government, and we want to do it as soon as possible. We are also willing to respect Leader THUNE's desire to negotiate after the shutdown.

So Democrats are offering today a very simple, straightforward compromise, and if Republicans accept

this, we could open the government today. Wouldn't that be fabulous—show that we can come together with a commonsense, bipartisan compromise and open government.

All we have to do is have a 1-year extension of the existing law dealing with tax credits; and over the next year, we can figure out a long-term solution to the healthcare challenge that we are facing as a country.

This proposal opens the government and ensures that families who are shopping right now for their healthcare can get immediate financial relief at a time when costs are driving families to make incredibly difficult financial decisions.

And we believe that, while we are trying to figure out a long-term solution to the healthcare crisis, people should not be penalized, people should not be suffering. Give the relief that they need now, and over the next year we will work together to find a more comprehensive solution.

We know that right now our Nation has experienced a healthcare crisis where costs are skyrocketing and too many Americans are risking losing their coverage. Too many Americans are struggling to choose between food or gas or healthcare. And it is not just Americans in blue States; let's be clear. Families in every State across the country are paying these prices. Every one of us has families that are experiencing this now in our States. But we can take action today to give our constituents some immediate financial relief and prevent them from being priced out of the insurance market.

We all want to end the shutdown. We want to ensure that government services can continue, and we want to ensure our hard-working Federal employees get the pay that they have earned. But Democrats have made clear since day one that in order to get the votes that Republicans need, we must address the healthcare crisis—because the American people have made it clear they want Congress to take action on this issue. It is literally life or death for far too many American families.

I know many of my Republican colleagues want to work on this issue too. I have had conversations with so many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who want to try to figure out how we fix this. But they have said repeatedly, "We won't negotiate until government reopens." Leader THUNE has said:

[G]ive us the votes to open up the government. Then we will have a conversation about some of these issues that you want to discuss. And I think health care is certainly something that we are anxious to talk about.

And perhaps, most importantly, even President Trump has said he would be happy to work with Democrats on healthcare policies but only once the government is reopened.

Well, I agree with my Republican colleagues: It is not realistic to reform a

major policy, major healthcare policy, in just a few days. It is not going to happen. And I respect Leader THUNE and President Trump's desire to work on this when the government has reopened. I am willing to compromise on that. My colleagues are willing to compromise on this. It is something that can be done today if we need to. But our Republican colleagues have to be willing to compromise too. Compromise is a two-way street.

We want them to show us that these are not just empty words, that they really are willing to compromise and they do want to take action. So that is why we put forward this very simple proposal: Extend the tax credits for 1 year. We are not asking to make any major changes to the current law; just extend that and protect people who are suffering right now and are hurting. We are just asking to keep the credits in place for 1 year so that families can see some immediate financial relief from the costs that are going through the roof, so that they can make important decisions about buying their healthcare right now—right now—during open enrollment.

This is live. People are dealing with this situation as we speak. We can fix this. If we care about making sure families can afford their healthcare, we should all agree on that. We should get 100 votes here for people to say: We are going to do everything we can to protect healthcare for Americans. And we can do that right now, and we can open up government right now. We can pay employees. We can move this country forward if we do that. All we need is a very simple extension of a law that has already existed for some time.

We know from the start that any deal will ultimately have to be a compromise. It doesn't have to be unanimous. There will be likely folks on both sides that may feel uncomfortable with this, and I get that. That is the way this place works.

But our proposal would try to work in a bipartisan way by creating a bipartisan committee that will continue negotiations on reforms ahead of next year's enrollment process so we are not pulling the rug out from underneath families. We are going to do it ahead of time so folks know exactly what to expect going forward.

I am telling the Presiding Officer now, if we vote for this compromise today, we could open up government. This could all be behind us. Families could get some certainty for their future, for the next year, while we look at long-term solutions; the government can open. But it takes all of us just to say: We are willing to compromise for the good of the country.

My colleagues are standing here saying: We are willing to compromise for the good of the country.

I just hope my Republican colleagues agree.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, there is a lot of focus on what divides us, but

the real opportunity here is what unites us. We are having a contest here with this shutdown, where our side is very concerned about what happens with these tax credits; your side is very concerned about using a shutdown as a tactic.

I think we both have pretty valid arguments, and one of the reasons I think there is merit in our position is the reality that, once the December 31 deadline arrives, people literally are going to lose healthcare.

So what unites us? Both sides really do want to have all of government paid and be reopened. And both sides, I believe, want to make certain the people we represent continue to have access to healthcare—that the healthcare they had in 2025 they are going to have in 2026.

That won't happen unless we resolve this. And given the time crunch, the only way, as a practical matter, we can do something that helps the people you represent, that helps the people I represent, is to extend what we have for another year.

So it is not an overreach on the part of, say, folks who want a single-payer healthcare system. It is not overreach or diminishing any concerns that folks on the Republican side—and, by the way, on our side—have about the cost of healthcare.

We are in a practical crunch, where, unless this U.S. Senate acts, the people we represent are going to lose healthcare. That is the fact. That is just the fact. It is the way it is, and we talked about how these premium increases are going to spike.

So what do we do in this situation where Leader THUNE, who we trust, who we respect, is taking a position that we won't have discussions until we reopen government.

Why do we object to that or are cautious about that? We trust Leader THUNE. We trust our Republican colleagues. But what happens after it goes out of the Senate? We have no guarantee whatsoever it will be taken up in the House at all.

So the question that farmer in Vermont would ask me, at the end of any agreement, is: PETER, what does this mean? Will I get my healthcare in 2026?

And unless we have it where it is going to get a vote with some support from our colleagues in the House, the answer is: I don't know, but I hope so.

So we find ourselves with January 1 here, and that farmer, that small business person, not having healthcare. And, again, this is the lament I have. What we are trying to do here—the folks who are going to benefit or not suffer are Republicans who voted for Trump and Democrats who voted for Harris and Independents who didn't like either candidate at all.

So we have an opportunity—and actually, we are the only people in the United States of America who have an opportunity—the only people, it is us, who have been entrusted by the people

whom we represent, with their vote, to solve this problem.

And what I think is being proposed has a quality that is rare around here. It is restraint. We are not trying to overreach. We are just saying: Maintain the status quo so that the folks in America who are getting their healthcare with the help of some tax credits will continue to have that healthcare in 2026, as they have in 2025.

So I hope we can come together for this temporary fix. And, by the way, I just want to say, the cost of healthcare is exploding, and we have an obligation if we want to maintain access to healthcare, to address that.

It is not a solution to deal with the healthcare crisis by taking people off of healthcare. They still get sick. So when our leader says that we want this bipartisan committee to address the cost of healthcare, we are sincere about that because the biggest threat to the continued access to healthcare is the exploding cost of healthcare.

I yield to my colleague from Wisconsin.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Madam President, I rise today to echo, to underscore, to emphasize what my colleagues have just presented. This is our path forward. This is how we reopen the government and lower healthcare costs for millions of Americans.

This is what compromise looks like. Look, if I had my way, we would be making these enhanced premium tax credits for working families permanent. But I understand that we can't get everything that we want. That is how compromise works, and that is what our constituents expect that we do when we come here.

I know that giving relief for the 275,000 Wisconsinites who are shopping online at healthcare.gov for healthcare, as we speak—I know that this relief is urgent, just like it is urgent that we reopen our government.

I have had so many conversations with my Republican colleagues here in the Senate. I know that so many of them have expressed privately that they are supportive of a 1-year extension of Affordable Care Act tax credits. They are hearing from their constituents who will no longer be able to afford their healthcare also, just like we are.

So I hope my Republican colleagues can join us in voting to pass this proposal so that we can finally put this shutdown behind us and allow 22 million Americans to rest easier, knowing that their healthcare costs are not going to double, triple, or even worse.

I yield to the Senator from Arizona.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. KELLY. Madam President, for more than a month, I have been here in DC fighting to keep healthcare costs from spiking for my constituents, and for more than a month, I have been hearing from people I represent about

what their healthcare costs now and what it will cost if these tax credits are allowed to expire—people like Leslie from Buckeye, who is a diabetic and whose premium is about to go from \$600 a month to \$1,000 per month; and people like Jessica from Yuma. She and her husband currently pay \$560 per month for them and their three kids. That is going to go to \$3,100 per month if these tax credits are not extended.

And for more than a month, I have been waiting for the President or Republican leadership in the Senate to sit down with us and try to figure this out, or even show that they care about the millions of Americans in our States who are in the same boat, people like Leslie and Jessica.

Now, that hasn't happened. The President, as far as I can tell, has spent about 1 hour in the Oval Office with congressional leadership on this issue—1 hour in 37 days. He has spent more time talking about his ballroom and on two overseas trips and at a costume party at Mar-a-Lago, and of course, on the golf course.

The House of Representatives has been on a 7-week paid vacation. They are not even pretending to care about these rising healthcare costs; and the Senate, not much better. Week after week, the leadership of the Senate breaks for a long weekend, all while Americans are suffering. And they are suffering even more because Donald Trump is using them as pawns in this fight.

He is still trying to illegally withhold SNAP benefits from hungry Americans, including children, to use as leverage. Donald Trump's official position on the government shutdown is that he will let hard-working Americans go hungry until we give in to his demands to let healthcare premiums go up dramatically for millions of Americans.

Now, is that the position of my Republican colleagues? I keep hearing from many of you that you want to do something about this, but you say you can't negotiate, not now.

So let's just lay it out here. We need to extend government funding to reopen the government, but we also need to extend these tax credits so millions of Americans can actually afford their healthcare.

So let's do both—no gimmicks, no changes. Let's reopen the government, but we can do that knowing that Jessica and Leslie and a whole bunch of other people that we represent can take their kid to a doctor and fill their prescriptions for another year.

There is no reason why we can't agree on this. If you want to reopen the government and you want to help keep health insurance premiums from spiking, then let's do it. But if you say no, if you say you can't vote for something like this, well, let's just be honest about it. Tell the Jessicas and Leslies in your State that they are not going to be able to afford their healthcare anymore. Tell them that Donald

Trump thinks that they should go to a food bank for groceries so they can have something to eat.

Now, I also think we need to be perfectly clear about why we are here and how we got here. All of this—all of this—we have discussed over the last month is because Donald Trump and Republicans in the House and Senate wanted to give a big, giant tax cut to the wealthiest Americans—a \$4 trillion giveaway.

And, again, we want a deal. We can choose to fix this so Jessica and Leslie and millions of others can afford to have basic healthcare.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER. Madam President, I actually have written notes here. I came prepared to talk about the importance of the ACA tax credits, and as I sat here, I prayed: What do I even say in this moment?

There is a Scripture that says:

Choose ye this day.

Today, we have an opportunity to make a choice. We have an opportunity to do something that is so plain and so simple.

There is a book in the Bible called the Book of Habakkuk. A lot of people don't even know it. It is like three chapters. In it, it says: We always hear, how long? Not long?

No, in it, it says long. It says pain. It says corruption. It says suffering.

But what it does say is, make a plan and make it plain. So what we come today to say is we have something that is plain and simple and will lift up America. And that is the opportunity to vote, open the government, and restore people's healthcare. It is that plain. It is that simple.

We are not saying you are better than us and we are better than you. We are saying link them together on behalf of the American people.

It is a sad day in America when people have to choose between their healthcare and housing or their healthcare and food. We are not in a pandemic. There are no wars on our shores. This should not be a hard time for us. We are not without resources in this country.

So, today, as many people are being priced out of the American dream, I ask my colleagues: Come to the table. Work with us.

I am so proud to be one of the freshman class—one of the most diverse classes in the history of this Chamber—with ELISSA SLOTKIN, with RUBEN GALLEGOS, with ADAM SCHIFF, with ANDY KIM, and my sister Senator ANGELA ALSOBROOKS.

Five of the six of us came from the House of Representatives. And so for us, it is almost like we have a foot in both worlds. And for us, this proposal is an opportunity to not only pass something here but to pass something in the House that becomes a law and that gets something for the American people.

We also have relationships and have been in conversations with our former House Republican colleagues who also want to get something done. And so, today, again, off script, but in my heart, we are standing here for the American people saying we can end this today.

And we are saying to the President of the United States—I hope you can hear us. We are saying to the President of the United States that you said it yourself after Tuesday's election, this is hurting Republicans. Well, you know what? It is also hurting all of America. And so we hope that you will engage in something that is simple and clear. Open the government and make sure we restore people's tax credits together.

Again, how long? Long if we choose to be. But we have a choice in this moment. And so we hope that you will come to the table. Let's make a deal.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. McCORMICK). The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Delaware, wise words. And I thank Senator SCHUMER, all of our colleagues that have gathered here today. We truly come in good faith.

I thank our Republican colleague who is listening to us right now and for the good work that he has done in trying to bring people together.

And we know there are a number of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle who have been working diligently with Democrats to try to resolve this. And we come in good faith because we know this isn't a blue-State or a red-State problem. It is everyone's problem.

When we look at the people who are on these Affordable Care Act plans, they tend not to work at big corporations. If they did, they would have healthcare; they do have healthcare. They tend not to work in government, local, State, Federal; they tend to have healthcare. They work at small businesses.

They are entrepreneurs, like the woman that I spent time with last weekend in Eagan, MN, who has one employee. She is so proud of her business. She has been doing better. He had cancer a few years ago, and he got through it. He is married, has kids. That plan, she pays for 75 percent of the premium for the employee, and he pays for 25 percent of the premiums. And she just looked at what happened, and she said: I don't know if I can keep him on. They are going to double. Those are the people we are talking about.

Farmers and ranchers, 27 percent of the farmers in our country are on this kind of plan. So these are people that are just on the margins so much because they have decided to go out on their own and be entrepreneurs. Or when I talk to my rural hospitals, they tell me how the people who are on

these plans, if they can't afford a doubling or tripling of the premiums, which is what we are seeing right now with the numbers that came out on the Marketplace—if it is doubled or tripled, they will just drop their plans because they still got to get groceries. They still got to pay the mortgage. So then they are going to drop their plans, and then the rural hospitals, that are already just hanging on, aren't going to be able to make it.

So it is all of a mix of things that I think would defy people's predictions of who is depending on these plans, and I think we are starting to hear from them now. So we have this opportunity. This is really, I would say, a practical plan. It looks at what we need to do to open the government again. It looks at the work that has been done by our great leaders in appropriations, and it says: OK. What can we do about healthcare right now?

We disagreed with the bill that got passed this summer on our side, but what can we do right now? And what we can do right now is stop this doubling and tripling of these healthcare premiums. And it is not something that is going to help in the end of December or January; it is a now thing. They are making their decisions now.

So that is why we came forward with a lot of people in our caucus, as you can imagine, having differing views and wanting more in good faith, but we figure this is a good idea so that we can, one, help these people in all our States, and then, two, look at reforms. We are open to reforms, and then these reforms would have to be done before these tax credits expire at the end of next year.

But it will get us through this, and, most important, it will get people through it like Elizabeth of St. Peter, MN, who told me: "I have no idea how I am going to come up with the extra \$200" each month.

This is what is happening. People who are terrified of what is going on.

So we have this moment in time. We are ready to work through the weekend. We hope our colleagues are as well. So let's get to the table.

I hope the President comes and meets with us. The amount of money we are talking about here is about the same as the money that went to Argentina. I am not going to relitigate that, but it shows what we could do and why we could do it. So let's get it done. Thank you.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I join all of my Democratic colleagues here today to offer this proposal on the healthcare issue that has been holding all of us here and all of the American public for weeks now because after Republicans refused to work with us to save the premium tax credits all this past year, what we hear Republican leaders saying now is they maybe, possibly, will talk about healthcare. It just has to be later.

We are so far past that. Open enrollment is happening right now. Republicans have already pushed millions of Americans off that tax credit cliff. If we truly want to help these people, Republicans need to work with us as fast as possible to pass this clean, 1-year extension.

This is not some pie-in-the-sky request. As the previous speaker alluded to, if Republicans had no problems with Trump's shoveling nearly twice as much money at Argentina, why would they oppose giving this kind of support to our own American families? Is there no time for working families? Are there no funds for healthcare?

I cannot accept that. We cannot accept that. We can act, but we have to do it now. Every day that passes, this damage gets worse, and, by the way, harder to reverse. The best and quickest way to address the MAGA healthcare hike is this clean 1-year extension of the enhanced premium tax credit written into the CR that we ultimately will vote on to reopen the government.

Like my colleagues, I have heard so many heartbreaking stories from people in my State. They are not political. They don't care about Democrats, Republicans, but I will tell you, they are at a breaking point. Some of them have been on the verge of tears as they talked to me, explaining how they simply cannot afford to buy healthcare for next year. That weighs heavily on me and all of my colleagues. We carry their stories with us. Their words are on repeat in my mind every minute I walk through these halls.

I am here today fighting with my heart and soul. I am giving Republicans every opportunity in the world to do the right thing. I have been out here on this floor. I have spoken ad nauseam about how letting these tax credits expire will actually hurt people in Republican States the most.

So we are here today to say our hand is outstretched. We are ready to go, a 1-year clean extension, and we can reopen the government and save so many families misery in this country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Mr. President, I speak today to echo the sentiments of my fellow Members of the caucus. This is a moment where, at least in Colorado, we hear stories every day of people faced with the challenge of whether to pay their rent or to make sure they maintain their healthcare, people who have preexisting medical conditions that are worried that if they go off their healthcare now, they might be pushed into a circumstance where they can only receive attention in emergency room situations, defeating the purpose of their treatments.

By going forward and taking a 1-year extension, nothing new, but just a 1-year extension, we allow all those people in Colorado and across the country to sort through their healthcare issues,

to reequilibrate, and to make sure that they are not left out in the cold. And I think that is the key here. We are looking at tens of millions of people that will either lose their healthcare or have dramatically significant increases in the cost of their premiums if we do nothing.

So I hope that we can come together and move forward with this clean CR with the extension of the subsidized tax credit for the ACA.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, all across our country, in every congressional district, in every corner of every State, families are suffering. They are taking a look at what it is going to cost to buy healthcare for this coming year. And they are going: Wow. I won't be able to afford that. I guess I will go without.

And we know what happens when people go without healthcare. And this is clearly not something that is a blue issue or a red issue; it is an issue for every family, affordable, quality healthcare.

And I know that is not just a concern held by Democratic Senators; it is a concern held by Republican Senators. So we have a common desire, Democrats and Republicans together, to address this concern. I think about some of the folks who have written in from my home State, and I know my colleagues on both sides of the aisle are getting the same letters, the same phone calls. Erik in Corvallis got a letter that his insurance premium is exploding from \$183 to—get this—\$1,588. Wow. That is roughly a sevenfold increase.

I heard from Leah in Eugene whose monthly payment is going from \$462 to \$1,438, a threefold increase.

And Stacey in Lincoln City is seeing an increase from \$1,300 to about \$3,200, almost a \$2,000 increase.

So those stories are everywhere in our country. And there is so much work we can do on healthcare together. The President has said: Let's negotiate on those complex issues after the government is opened.

And those complex issues, they may be things like the cost-sharing reduction program, they may be things like how do we lower the cost of drugs so we don't pay more for drugs than the folks in Canada across the border to the north pay for their drugs or the folks in England or Australia or Japan.

We can work together on strategies to see where there is waste in the system or are there scams and scandals in the system? Let's shine the light on them, and let's fix them after the government reopens.

Well, let's just do this one piece, extend one particular tax provision that is in law now for this coming year, so there is immediate relief for folks who are getting on the internet at this very moment and going: Oh, my goodness. I can't afford that—the Eriks, the Leahs,

the Staceys that exist in every corner of every State.

I have been hearing from small businesses, and they have been saying that Main Street is "Pain Street." Why? Because so many of the small businesses in my State, and I am sure in every State, go to the ACA exchange in order to buy insurance. And so they are reeling from that impact. They are reeling from other economic fluctuations in the country, and they are saying: Can't you figure this out? Can't you figure this out?

So I have been hearing from colleagues on both sides of the aisle: We want to fix these tax credits, these enhanced tax credits for people to buy insurance.

Well, let's do it. We can open the government today. We can do it today. Today, we can address the issue my colleague from Wisconsin was speaking to just an hour or so ago. He was saying people who are working should get a paycheck. That will happen if we pass this today. He was saying folks who are furloughed should get a paycheck. We can do that by putting them back to work by opening the government today.

And then we can negotiate on those complex issues to make this system work a whole lot better because all of us know that our system is overly complicated, overly bureaucratic, inefficient, and we know that there can be improvements. So let's work on those things together.

The proposal that the minority leader has put forward says: Let's form a special committee to work on those issues and find some proposals to take us to a better place.

That is the type of partnership that we need to give encouragement to the American people that we are willing to work together to solve the challenges they see every day in their lives at their kitchen tables.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. President, colleagues, I rise in support of this proposal to extend the ACA tax credits, extend the existing law for another year, reopen the government, and give us time to negotiate the longer term extension of the Affordable Care Act.

This whole discussion and, frankly, the whole debate we have been having over the last several weeks over the Affordable Care Act brings me back to the immediate aftermath of the passage of that bill when I was doing sidewalk office hours inside the Glendale Galleria. I had my little coffee table set up there.

I had someone come up to my table and ask me how I voted on that bill, how I voted on ObamaCare. When I told him that I voted for it, he was indignant.

He said: What could you possibly have liked? What could you have possibly liked about that bill?

I said: Well, actually, there were a lot of things I liked about it. I liked

the fact that if you had a preexisting condition, you could get healthcare.

I remember another of my constituents saying that he was 65; he was a preexisting condition.

I liked the fact that if you had a kid who was 26 or under, you could keep them on your insurance policy if they didn't have one.

Then I said: I liked the fact that tens of millions of people that can't otherwise afford healthcare are going to be able to get healthcare.

He looked at me and said something that I never imagined I would hear. He said: And you really think that is such a good idea?

That is, that millions of people who can't afford healthcare would be able to get it.

I said: Well, yes, I do. Don't you?

He said: No, I don't. If they can't afford it, they shouldn't have it.

And I recognize the moment he said it that he was speaking for millions of people.

I had had one of those huge townhalls with 3,000 people, and no one would say that even at those screaming townhalls. But his view was that if they can't afford it, they shouldn't have it, and I think that view is really at the center of this debate.

In the wealthiest country in the world, doesn't the government have any responsibility to make sure that healthcare is accessible to people? I think we do.

Now, who are these millions of people that are going to lose their healthcare if we don't extend the ACA tax credits? Well, let me just share the stories of two of them, my constituents who wrote to me.

The first one said:

My bronze HMO high deductible plan is \$752.23 per month, and using most, but not all of the tax credit, my monthly premium is \$200 per month and that is using \$552.23 worth of credits.

I'm currently single and retired so my income is well within the limits to qualify for the credits. [But] if all the credits go away for 2026, this will wipe me out and I will likely go without insurance even though I know it is not a good idea.

Here is the story from a second constituent:

Anyone else gotten their health plan rates for 2026? I did today, and I will have to cancel mine. With chronic conditions requiring daily prescriptions, weekly doctor visits, current quarterly labs and biannual mammograms, my share of cost will go up well over \$1,000 per month, and as a senior on a fixed and low income, I could not possibly come up with a thousand dollars a month. Sadly, there are so many seniors who will be in this position.

That is who we are talking about here. These are some of the millions of people that will lose their access to healthcare if we don't extend the ACA.

So I urge support for this. As Leader SCHUMER said, we can reopen the government today if we can simply extend the tax credits for another year and give us time, through a bipartisan commission, to work on a more permanent extension. I urge support.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I thank my colleagues for this unified support for a measure that is eminently reasonable, and I thank the leader of our side, Senator SCHUMER, for advancing this proposal.

It is a compromise. It is simple and plain. And I will be very blunt: It is not everything I would have wanted. Like the Senator from Wisconsin, my friend Senator BALDWIN, I would have wanted the healthcare tax credits to be permanently guaranteed. I would have wanted a guarantee as well that there be no rescissions or impoundments of funds, as this President has done repeatedly. I would have wanted a reversal of the firings, the so-called RIFs, the reductions in force that have been eminently unfair and a guarantee of backpay to everybody who has been furloughed. There are other provisions that, for me, were profoundly important. It is a compromise. And "compromise" is not a four-letter word; it is the way to get things done.

This picture of unity is worth a thousand of my words, but it is also a clear response to a crisis that we face, and we face it today. It is a crisis in healthcare. It is a crisis in hunger. It is a crisis in air transportation.

For millions of Americans, it is a crisis of affordability. Nobody in America needed Tuesday's elections to tell them that the cost of rent and electricity and food and all the other necessities in life are spiraling out of control.

And, yes, healthcare costs are spiraling out of control. They are at the kitchen table right now across America, looking at the exchanges, and concluding they simply can't afford those spiking premiums, multiples of three and four times—and at least twice—what they were paying. Many of them are taking the risk that they will go without insurance.

This measure guarantees an outcome. The majority leader Senator THUNE has said he can't guarantee an outcome. All he can promise is a process. And I am unwilling to accept a promise of some vote at an indefinite point on an undefined bill sometime in the future because the urgency of now for American families means they are making choices about whether they can afford insurance at this moment for next year.

In fairness to the majority leader, he can't promise anything for either the Speaker of the House or the President. They have been absent without leave. They have been AWOL. They have refused to talk.

We are presenting them now with a reasonable compromise that the majority leader can accept and our colleagues on the other side of the aisle should embrace.

The problem here is one of trust. What we have seen from the administration is a strategy of maximum pain to magnify political pressure.

In just minutes from now, in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, this administration will argue that SNAP benefits should be ended after the President himself promised that they would be paid in full in compliance with the district court orders in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. There is no way to trust that SNAP benefits will be provided without a guarantee from the courts.

The urgency that we face is also in air transportation. We all want people to be able to reach their destinations safely. It has to come first. And we need to make sure that the TSA and air controllers are paid. They are heroes for having worked for so long without pay.

We need to stop the madness of this trend line. It is a through line in the administration's tactics here. It is a through line of cruelty and stupidity that has magnified the costs for the American people not just in blue States but all across the country.

We should seek reform and improvement in the ACA, eliminating any kind of fraud and stopping the spiraling increase in healthcare costs. But I should warn my colleagues: We will not sacrifice the ACA.

Very revealing yesterday in the hearing of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was the commentary from a number of my Republican colleagues in effect saying that we should kill the ACA—an effort that has been part of their relentless campaign over the last 15 years to decimate this resounding and important law that now is embraced by the vast majority of the American people.

We put in the record stories of individuals from Michigan and Pennsylvania and Iowa.

Aaron Lehman, a fifth-generation farmer, told us: I grow corn, soybean, oats, and hay with my family. The Affordable Care Act has been one of the best investments in rural healthcare in decades.

We cannot afford, as a nation, to go back to the days when preexisting conditions were a pretext for denying healthcare. If someone had a history of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, HIV, asthma, depression, pregnancy—the list goes on—insurers could force patients to pay more or refuse to offer them coverage at all.

Standing strong for the ACA very simply means providing healthcare to Americans. Extending the healthcare tax credits for 1 year is a compromise that makes sense. It will put the government back to work fully and capably and fairly.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this reasonable compromise.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, we are now in the 38th day of a government shutdown. That means that Federal employees all over this country who

have to feed their families are not getting paychecks. It means that air traffic controllers are forced to work crazy hours. We worry about the safety of our flights right now. We worry about Capitol Police officers right here in DC having a hard time feeding their families. These are hard-working people who are doing important work. They deserve respect. They deserve to be paid. This shutdown must end as quickly as possible.

On top of the fact that we have hundreds of thousands of workers not getting paid, we now have a President who, for the first time in the history of this country, is willing to allow our kids—low-income, working-class children—to go hungry in order to try to make a political point—a point, by the way, that the American people are seeing through.

The cause of this shutdown is not complicated. For the first time ever, the majority party in the Senate, which needs 60 votes to pass a budget, is refusing to negotiate. It is their way or the highway; take it or leave it; we have the majority; we are not talking to you—despite the fact that they only have 53 votes.

To make the situation even more absurd and to show the American people the contempt the Republicans hold for negotiations and democracy, you have a Speaker of the House who has now given his Members a 6-week paid vacation. The country is in the midst of a major crisis, and Republican Members of the House are nowhere to be seen. They are on a paid vacation. If that doesn't tell you everything you need to know about whether Republicans are willing to negotiate, I don't know what will.

Everybody in this country knows that our current healthcare system is broken. They know that we pay by far—not even close—the highest prices in the world for healthcare, and some 85 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured. They know that we are the only major country on Earth not to guarantee healthcare to all people as a human right, something which must change.

What they also know is that Donald Trump and the Republicans, through their horrendous One Big Beautiful Bill, are making a broken, dysfunctional healthcare system even worse, taking it to the verge of collapse. That legislation is doubling premiums for over 20 million Americans who are in the Affordable Care Act exchange.

In my State, we are hearing from Vermonters who are being asked to pay a tripling of their rates and even a quadrupling of the rates. Who in God's name, at a time when healthcare costs are already so high, can afford a doubling, a tripling, or quadrupling of their rates? That is insane. Nobody in my State or, I expect, in this country can afford to pay that.

Further, that One Big Beautiful Bill will throw 15 million people off the healthcare they now have, as a result

of massive cuts to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act. According to studies, that would result in some 50,000 Americans dying unnecessarily every year—low-income, working-class people who have chronic illnesses who will no longer be able to get healthcare. That is what is being discussed.

Does anybody think it is a good idea to allow 50,000 of our fellow Americans to die unnecessarily each year?

And all of this is being done in order to give \$1 trillion in tax breaks to the 1 percent.

No, I do not believe that Elon Musk and Mr. Zuckerberg and Mr. Bezos and the other multibillionaires deserve a trillion dollars in tax breaks in order to throw 50 million Americans off the healthcare they have and double premiums for over 20 million Americans. I don't believe that. The overwhelming majority of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents don't believe that either.

The American people understand that the Republican Party controls the White House; they control the Senate; they control the House of Representatives. And, understandably, for that reason, poll after poll shows that Americans hold the Republicans accountable for this shutdown.

But it is not just polls. On Tuesday, there was an election in which Trumpism was overwhelmingly rejected from Maine to California and a lot of States and cities in between. And one of the key reasons is that Americans want Democrats to make certain that they do not experience huge increases in their healthcare premiums or get thrown off the healthcare they have. That is what they are saying: We cannot afford a doubling or tripling in our healthcare costs. Stand with us.

That is what that election was significantly about.

President Trump claims to be a dealmaker. In fact, he wrote a book called "The Art of the Deal." Well, Mr. President, the ball is in your court right now. Help negotiate a deal. Show us what a great dealmaker you are. Help us negotiate a deal which protects the healthcare of tens of millions of Americans, and let us end this shutdown today. We can end it in the next few hours.

That is what this struggle is about. That is what this shutdown is all about. It is whether Republicans succeed in making a broken and dysfunctional healthcare system even worse by making healthcare unaffordable for working-class and middle-class Americans. It is about whether millions of our fellow Americans no longer have health insurance and that many of them will die unnecessarily.

Mr. President, we are hearing right now—every one of our offices—we are hearing tragic stories of families having to decide whether they can pay for their parent's cancer treatment, for example, or whether they will see a parent die without that lifesaving care. There are millions of Americans now

dealing with chronic disease. They are dealing with cancer. They are dealing with diabetes. They are dealing with Alzheimer's. They are dealing with heart disease. And they are wondering, if they get thrown off their healthcare, if premiums go so high, how are they going to stay alive? How are they going to take care of their parents, their kids?

That is what this shutdown is about.

And whether it is in Maine, New Hampshire, Nevada, or Vermont, the American people want us to stand with them and that is what this whole debate is about. We cannot fail the American people. They are looking to us to make sure that they continue to have healthcare. Let us not betray them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I actually like good local journalism. I am going to fight as hard as I can in the U.S. Congress to keep local journalism and fight AI, that basically might oblige it, for all intents and purposes.

So I am just going to read my statement here.

In an article printed in the Vancouver Columbian on August 11, 2025, the headline is "Child care center owner urges Congress to take action to save the [Affordable Care Act] tax credits, expansion."

The owner of an east Vancouver child care center joined Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., Monday morning to draw attention to Washington's rising health care costs.

The two spoke at a news conference at Tree Hill Learning Center on Southeast 196th Avenue, along with representatives from a local insurance agency and Workforce Southwest Washington.

Washington's Insurance Commissioner said that in May that 14 health insurers in the state were seeking a rate increase for next year. The proposed increases for plans sold on the individual health insurance market averaged 21.2 percent and ranged [anywhere] from 9.6 percent to 37.3 percent.

The office expects premium increases to affect about 300,000 people statewide.

Dana Christiansen, owner of Tree Hill Learning Center, said this isn't the first time she has had to face rising healthcare costs for her two Vancouver childcare facilities.

"Each year, I face a difficult decision of how much of the rate [increase]—currently at 24 percent—do I take on and absorb," Christiansen said. "How much do I pass on to the employee? How much do I pass on to the families in the form of [higher childcare] tuition increases?"

Each rate change request is evaluated independently by actuarial staff, said Aaron VanTuyl, spokesman for the insurance commissioner's office. That's mandated by state law.

[But] the rate changes are usually finalized in September, VanTuyl said. Claims and administrative costs, medical and prescription drug costs, company expenses and profits will all be reviewed by the commissioner's office as part of determining if they are reasonable.

Cantwell called the proposed increases a threat to health care affordability.

The insurance commissioner's office said Congress' anticipated failure to renew the enhanced premium tax credit is contributing to the proposed increases.

Congress created the premium tax credit in 2014, as part of the Affordable Care Act, to lower health plan premium costs for eligible households. The American Rescue Plan in 2021 expanded who was eligible for the credit and the Inflation Reduction Act extended it to this year. It's set to expire at the end of this year.

"We [all] know that increased rates are something we could deal with in Congress," Cantwell said. "That is why today I am urging Congress to take action . . . [on] the Affordable Care Act tax credits and their expansion, and make sure [that] we do so before the end of the year."

The senator's office said rate increases are being requested nationwide and three states have already approved them.

The Congressional Budget Office expects fewer people will participate in subsidized exchanges and the uninsured rate will climb if the enhanced premiums aren't extended.

NBC News reported earlier this year that Republican lawmakers are split on whether to extend the tax credit. Some said the federal government could no longer . . . support it, while others wanted it extended.

Just a little side note before I keep reading, five of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle said they wanted the tax credits extended. That was early in August.

The Washington Health Benefit Exchange, the state's health insurance marketplace, estimated about 216,000 health plan enrollees in Washington were eligible for the enhanced premium tax credit.

Christiansen said her business already operates on thin margins.

"I view providing healthcare benefits not as a perk, but as a fundamental necessity," she said. "I never want an unforeseen illness to financially ruin an employee or force them to neglect their health."

Still, rising child care costs are forcing her [clientele] to reconsider if they can afford to keep their child in a licensed facility or continue working [at all].

"We cannot solve this problem alone," Christiansen said. "We need the support of lawmakers, the insurance industry, and regulatory agencies to address the root cause of the rates and increases that are disproportionately affecting those who need it the most."

As the clock continues to tick here—that is actually the end of the story. I wanted to read that story because that was August. It showed, at that point in time, we had people on this side of the aisle who wanted to negotiate. They were in the news. I summated it by saying there were five people, but I am sure there are more by now.

That is why we are asking with this simple proposal: Let's open the government, extend these tax credits for a year, because we know there is bipartisan support in both the House and Senate to do that, and continue to reform this so we can keep this childcare facility in Vancouver, WA, in business.

Let's not make this—we shared a lot of stories about individual people, but we haven't shared enough stories about the small business impact and the economic impact to employers, when you take affordable health insurance away from them and they don't have options.

This owner lamented in the story: Which should I do? Do I absorb these costs and not be a profitable business? Do I make these employees not have

health insurance? Do I raise these costs and then these parents can't have the childcare that they need to stay?

She told me on that day that, literally, some people decided to stop work because they no longer could afford childcare. This is ruining our whole economic picture by making insurance too expensive, by making the costs play too big a role in our economy, and taking workers away from us.

I support this 1-year proposal. I support us working together to reform the system. I have championed many things in the Affordable Care Act that drive down costs and have driven down costs, and I will work with any of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to continue and expand that work because it is important. It is important for us to continue to have affordability, particularly in healthcare. As we have a rising baby boomer population reaching retirement age, we have no other choice but to focus on affordability.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, millions of Americans are counting on Democrats to stop Donald Trump and Republicans from raising healthcare costs.

I am here to say: Democrats will not back down. Fighting to lower healthcare costs is a righteous fight.

For too many Americans, healthcare premiums are going up by hundreds or even thousands of dollars a month. Who has that kind of money?

Just this week, I talked to a woman in Florida, practically in Donald Trump's backyard. She is a wife, she is a mother of four lively kids, and she is about to lose her health insurance because of Trump's cuts.

What does that mean for her? She has malignant melanoma, and now she is looking at canceling her ongoing treatments because, once she loses her insurance, she cannot afford treatment for her cancer. That is deeply, deeply wrong.

Democrats are in this fight for the right reasons, and Democrats will stay in this fight for the right reasons.

In July, congressional Republicans worked hand in hand with President Trump on their biggest passion project—jamming through a bill to hand out massive tax cuts to millionaires, billionaires, and giant corporations. Then, just to put a little extra whip cream on top of their Republican ice cream sundae, they paid for those billionaire tax cuts by slashing healthcare coverage for millions of Americans. Every single Republican voted for it, and every single Democrat voted against it.

When the Republicans voted to cut healthcare funding last July, Democrats said: We cannot sign off on a 2026 budget that cuts healthcare for millions of Americans.

On September 30, the 2025 budget expired, and Democrats were ready to ne-

gotiate to get some of those healthcare cuts reversed in the 2026 budget, but the Republicans didn't want to negotiate. Nope. The Republicans decided they would rather shut down government than offer a single nickel to help Americans manage healthcare costs. They told Democrats to vote for the Republicans' spending bill—take it or leave it—and they have repeated their "take it or leave it" through 15 votes and 38 days.

Democrats have asked over and over and over and over to negotiate to help Americans with their healthcare costs, but Donald Trump and the Republicans have flatly refused to even talk to Democrats to try to get the government back open. Not even once have the Republicans been willing to negotiate—not once.

So where are we now?

Well, Trump tweeted seven times in one day about his brandnew, marbled bathroom at the White House while Americans have turned to crowdfunding to pay for their healthcare and grocery bills.

Trump hosted a "Great Gatsby"-themed party while he turned off food assistance for millions of Americans. Do you know the message to 42 million Americans from Donald Trump? Eat dirt.

And Trump is weighing the important idea of etching corporations' names into his grand, new, gold-encrusted ballroom while millions of Americans who will lose their health insurance will get sick and be forced to decide whether to give up care altogether or go bankrupt in trying to pay for it.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress are in disarray. The House is now in its seventh week of a paid vacation. They couldn't reopen the government if they wanted to because they aren't even in Washington to vote. They have Members—Republican and Democratic Members—who want a deal on healthcare, but Speaker JOHNSON just says: No. Everyone spend another week on a paid vacation.

Here on the Senate side, Republicans are in chaos. Leader THUNE puts the same bill up over and over for the same votes, but he won't talk about changing a single word. Now he can't even organize a vote among Republicans to reorganize the government. Instead, Republicans are fighting with Republicans over what to do, and still no one says: Let's help families on healthcare and get the government open.

So Democrats have put a proposal on the table: Lower costs by extending health tax credits for 1 year, and reopen government. Do it all in one vote, and during this next year, we will continue to work to make our healthcare system work better. It is a common-sense plan that helps people across this country, and that gets our government open. The Senate could do its part to reopen the government in less than an hour. We could do it right now, this

afternoon. We just have to put the interests of the American people ahead of politics.

Americans are demanding, urging, begging Congress to do something—to do something before Americans are forced to get sicker and sicker before they can get healthcare, to do something before healthcare costs go up and up and up for everyone in this country.

People are sick of Washington politics. So we ask our Republican colleagues: Help us do what is right for the American people and help us do it right now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I stand here today on behalf of the people of Massachusetts to say that we are angry.

We are angry that Trump and MAGA Republicans are doubling the costs for millions of Americans and that their healthcare bills are going to skyrocket when they promised lower prices.

We are angry that Trump and MAGA Republicans are stripping Medicaid from the most vulnerable people in our communities.

We are angry that Trump and the MAGA Republicans are making families with hungry children go to food pantries for their next meals and forcing families to choose between groceries and rent.

We are angry that Trump and MAGA Republicans are using public servants as pawns in their hateful, political games.

And we are angry that, during all of this, the Republicans have refused to come to the negotiating table.

The House of Representatives has been out for 6 weeks. They are in a political witness protection program across our Nation—refusing to come to Washington to sit down to negotiate on these issues.

Americans are counting the hours that are left to solve this healthcare crisis for them and their families. They are looking around for help, and they are looking around for hope, but they are all looking, instead, at cruelty, pain, fear. That is the agenda of Trump's MAGA Republican Party.

Last weekend, I met with Jeff from Natick, who is fighting stage IV lung cancer. He pays \$35,000 a year for an affordable care healthcare plan—\$35,000 a year. If he can't keep that insurance plan on December 31, he will have to pay \$300,000 a year. Jeff does not have \$300,000. That is about to hit him in about 7 weeks.

Barbara retired early to take care of her spouse with dementia. Her bill is going from \$7,500 a year to \$18,000 a year. She cannot afford that. There are 22 million stories like Jeff's, like Barbara's. There are 22 million of them who will be facing Thanksgiving and Christmas over the next 7 weeks, and there are no answers for them—22 million people. That is outrageous. These people are afraid, and they are angry.

By the way, we saw a lot of that anger come out on Tuesday night. They came out angry. They came out, out of fear, to vote. That is what happened. It is only going to build and build and build as each day goes by, and we cannot get an answer from the Republicans on how we are going to handle those people. How are we going to give them what they need for those families?

It is very difficult to fathom the abject cruelty of this President, who is happy to force Grandma to choose between paying for her prescription and paying for her heating bill, to force a caretaker to choose between being there for their parent with Alzheimer's or picking up an extra shift, to force a single mom to choose between paying for a checkup or paying for extra school snacks.

Since they took over in January, the Republicans promised that they were going to solve the healthcare crisis in our country, and all it has done is grow and grow and grow. Then they pass a bill to take away all of the healthcare coverage for all of these 22 million people and then transfer the money to billionaires in tax breaks. They swiped the healthcare of 22 million vulnerable people for billionaires.

Ralph Waldo Emerson—the great Massachusetts poet—said that “health is the first wealth.” MAGA Republicans and Trump have looted that wealth—that health—for those people. These people are angry, and they are afraid. They are afraid. They don't have the backup funding that millionaires and billionaires have.

Now, my father drove a truck for the Hood Milk Company. He drove a truck for the Hood Milk Company. I am his son. I believe that God created a world where every single person is able to receive the healthcare they are entitled to, to three meals a day, to put children through school, to keep them safe from illness, to give Americans dignity in tough times. Those are the families we are talking to right now. It is the milkmen. It is the workers in nursing homes. It is the children across our country who are going to see loved ones lose their healthcare in 7 weeks, and the Republicans refuse to come to the table.

Every American has a right to live in dignity in tough times. That is where we are right now. They are facing increases in electricity costs, in healthcare costs, in food costs, in clothing costs—in everything. We can solve at least the healthcare part of this issue right here. The richest Nation in the world can ensure peace and health and opportunity for every man and woman and child in our country.

We are the wealthiest Nation in the history of the world, and the Republicans are about to let 22 million of them lose their health insurance or see it increase by double or triple or, in the case of Jeff from Natick, 10 times—from \$30,000 a year to \$300,000 a year—and he is in stage IV lung cancer. And we are not even discussing this?

The House of Representatives is on a vacation for 6 weeks. Well, those 6 weeks—if you project them forward from now, we are talking about Christmas. That is what we are talking about.

What in the world is in the mind of Donald Trump that he would allow these families for the next 6 weeks to worry about where the coverage for their families is going to come from?

The very least we can do is extend the Affordable Care tax credits for one more year and provide some desperately needed relief for those who are struggling to get by, who need our help right now, who need the peace of mind right now.

Of those 220 Republicans in their political witness protection program across the country, they are going to have health insurance for their families. They don't have to worry this Thanksgiving or Christmas about the conversation that is going to take place.

All we are asking for is a vote to provide that healthcare for the next year for those families and reopen the government so the Federal workers can get paid and go back on the job. It is pretty simple. We are looking for any Republican anywhere to come and discuss it with us, negotiate it with us, and they just keep saying: No.

So this anger—this anger that people are feeling—these people are pissed off at the Federal Government. They are pissed off that they are losing coverage for their family members, and they want the Republicans to come to the table and solve this problem. What we saw on Tuesday night was the beginning of this anger being translated into action.

They asked an ancient Greek philosopher once: When will we know true justice?

And he answered: We will know true justice when those who have not been harmed are as angry as those who have been harmed.

Across our country right now, those who have not been harmed are angry on behalf of those who are about to be harmed—22 million people losing their health insurance, seeing skyrocketing health insurance premiums. These are families—42 million of them—without food stamps, without a SNAP program for nutrition for their families. People are angry, and they deserve an answer.

All we are asking for is 1 year so that we can negotiate this issue—1 year so we can give peace of mind to 22 million families so that they will know they will have health insurance after this Thanksgiving and Christmas.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I support this proposal and would like Americans to know why.

Since before Donald Trump was sworn in for a second term, Senate Democrats have known that this is a healthcare problem for millions of

American families that cries out for fixing.

Again and again, we asked our Republican colleagues to work with us, sit with us, and negotiate improvements in a black-letter law that makes Americans' healthcare better for American families. Again and again we were turned down.

So on the Senate Finance Committee, everybody knew this day was coming, long before Donald Trump took the oath of office. Now the crisis is here, and I am here to say our door is still open.

The Senate Finance Committee has a track record of getting bipartisan work done. Senator CRAPO and I wrote a bill that transformed how pharmacy benefit managers work in Medicare. It passed the Finance Committee 26 to nothing. Despite this track record, Republicans still refuse to sit down and even have a conversation about how to help these Americans afford their premiums. That is why we have all been out on the floor today.

I am in a fight for Bart and Carla from Eugene, OR, a few years away from Medicare. They have had long careers as a carpenter and a teacher. They worked hard. Now the rug is being pulled out from under them. They have been paying \$400 a month in premiums. Without an extension of the credits, they are going to pay \$2,200 a month. That is an increase they just can't handle.

My Republican colleagues have provided a host of excuses about why they can't work with us, but the excuses don't hold water. For example, there have been allegations of fraud—the same straw man that they used to make the largest Medicaid cuts in history.

Republicans pretend they are fighting for us, but, really, they are just pushing up costs and kicking working people off their health insurance. So to, again, try to bring everybody together, we introduced legislation that would prevent bad-actor brokers from enrolling or switching people into plans without their knowledge. That way we could slap fraudsters with criminal penalties when they harm consumers. On the Republican side, after all the talk, no cosponsors.

Finally, there has been an excuse that says this policy was created during COVID, and now that the pandemic is passed, the tax credits ought to lapse too. It doesn't make any sense to me. I don't see Republicans coming down to the floor, for example, to say that tele-health benefits for seniors on Medicare should expire because they were created during the pandemic.

This is something I feel strongly about. As my friend from Minnesota knows, I wrote that with the late Orrin Hatch on a bipartisan basis. And the first Trump administration used them to great success.

Just because a good healthcare policy was created in a crisis moment doesn't mean it ought to be ripped

away from Americans once the crisis is passed, especially when ending that policy would create a new crisis for over 20 million people who no longer will be able to afford good quality healthcare.

Those are just a couple of the Republican excuses. But the bottom line is, over here, we want to protect families' healthcare and keep premiums from rocketing into the stratosphere. Unfortunately, the Republicans haven't shared that view.

My hope is—and we have had an important conversation. I appreciate the leadership of Senator KLOBUCHAR. We have had an important conversation about trying to get our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to do the right thing. Join us. Join us, as we have done so often in the Senate Finance Committee, and lower Americans' healthcare costs.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, I believe in healthcare. Your health—my mother told me a long time ago—was everything, so take care of your health. It is vital. It is essential. I believe that healthcare is a human right. It is certainly something that the wealthiest Nation on the planet and in the history of humankind can and ought to provide for all of its citizens. It is right, it is fair, but it is also smart. A healthy nation is a strong nation. Healthy children are ready to learn.

That is why I have worked so hard and so long with my colleagues on this issue. As a matter of fact, long before I came to the Senate, I had been focused on this issue of healthcare, trying to get my home State of Georgia to expand. I keep preaching that sermon because right now, there are more than 500,000 Georgians who are in the healthcare coverage gap.

I came here in 2017, to this place, not as a Senator but as a pastor and as an activist. I remember getting arrested, I believe in 2017, when there were major healthcare cuts on the table. As I began to make my argument and gather with other pastors in the Rotunda, the Capitol Police—very professionally, but they began to say to us: Pastors, you can't gather and pray in the Rotunda. We will have to arrest you.

What they didn't understand is that I had already been arrested. My mind and my imagination had been arrested by this idea that surely the American Nation can do better than this.

Healthcare is a human right.

Dr. King, who led the church that I am still honored to lead, said that of all the injustices, inequality in healthcare is the most shocking and the most inhumane.

That is why I was proud to join my colleagues and I am proud to stand with my colleagues in this fight. This is about 22 million Americans who will see their healthcare premiums double; some, triple; and some, quadruple.

This is not theoretical stuff for me. These are the people in my community. These are folks sitting in the pews of my church. Many of them will lose their healthcare if something doesn't happen.

A few weeks ago, I was at the Evans County Memorial Hospital in Evans County. I have to tell you, that is a red district. I don't have a whole lot of votes. I have some. Claxton, GA—known for fruitcakes. I was at that hospital, and I can tell you that those folks were already worried because of the draconian cuts to Medicaid in the Big Beautiful Bill—the so-called Big Beautiful Bill.

Fifteen million Americans already stand to lose their healthcare, and then the premiums are raised for 22 million Americans while giving Elon Musk and people like him a tax cut? That is beyond the pale of partisanship. For me, that is not about Democrats and Republicans. You ask ordinary people on the street if they think that is fair.

I can tell you that those folks in Evans County—many of whom did not vote for me, but I am fighting for them because I am their Senator too. They are worried about it.

That is why we have been in this fight, and that is why we continue to stand to this very day. It is day 38. We are holding vigil because of the pain of the people we represent. There is a lot of pain to go around: 22 million whose premiums may go up or have gone up—they are seeing it on the portals right now; Federal workers who have been furloughed; the kids who—like I was—are in Head Start. We have Head Start centers that are about to shutter because of the government shutdown.

Let's be honest. The folks on SNAP were dragged into this fight. They were not a part of this. They were dragged into this fight. There are already legal provisions to make sure that they are cared for. And this administration right now is defying a court order to feed America's hungry people.

With all of that pain from the crisis in healthcare, from the ongoing government shutdown, we come to our sisters and our brothers on the other side, and we extend a hand of compromise, because it hasn't taken me long to learn, really, that is the only way you get anything done in this body.

I work all of the time with colleagues with whom I disagree about 90 percent of the time, because it is not about them, and it is not about me; it is about the people we represent.

The Founders were wise to organize our government in such a way that that is the only way to have sustainable change, is to do it on a bipartisan basis.

My colleagues have taken their position, and we have taken ours. Here we are at an impasse. But I represent a State that elected me and Donald Trump, so they expect us to figure it out.

Sometimes, when I am driving my car—I have a 9-year-old and a 6-year-

old, a 9-year-old daughter and a 6-year-old son. Sometimes they are in the back seat having a disagreement: He looked at me. She touched me. Then they say: Daddy—you know, they call on me.

Here is what I say more often than not: Figure it out. The two of you in the back seat of the car—that is your sister; that is your brother. We are all in the same car. We are trying to get to the same destination. Figure it out.

We are all in the same car tonight, Democrats and Republicans.

There is a way in which the poor and the wealthy—there is a way in which they are all in the same car. COVID reminded us of that. Before we had a vaccine, if my neighbor had the virus, I, too, was in peril. That didn't make my neighbor my adversary; that means I have a vested interest in making sure my neighbor has coverage.

So here is the proposal: a 1-year, clean extension of the ACA subsidy. You know that is not what we want. You know that if we had it our way, we would make it permanent. That is not what we fought for 38 days for—a 1-year extension—but we are offering that after standing for 38 days. A 1-year extension, and then let's sit down, and, in the words of Scripture, let us reason together. Let us have a conversation. Let's reopen the government. Let's extend healthcare to folks who, in real time, are opening up the portal, and they have sticker shock. And then let's sit down and figure it out because, if we are honest, the status quo is not working very well for anybody.

Anybody who is trying to defend the status quo has not been talking to ordinary people. There are a lot of things that need to be fixed. And we can do that, but we have to reopen the government and give people a little bit of hope—give those 22 million Americans hope, give the 44 million Americans who need SNAP some hope, give our Federal workers some hope.

There is an African-American proverb that says: When the elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.

It is the grass roots in Georgia and all across the Nation right now who are suffering because too often the politicians make the politics about the politicians rather than about the people.

Let's center the people. If we center the people, we will compromise and we will figure it out.

In closing—nobody believes a Baptist preacher when he says “in closing”—I have worked with Members of the Presiding Officer's party on a whole range of things. And at the risk of embarrassing him, TED CRUZ and I even work together every now and then. And I mention him because, early in my tenure here, he and I worked on a little thing—just a little provision—to try to get a little bit closer to building out this interstate, I-14, that would run through Georgia all the way to Texas.

The same road that runs through Texas runs through Georgia. And if we

can get that road built out, when it is time to get on that road, nobody asks you: Are you a Democrat or are you a Republican? Nobody asks you about your religion or if you have a religious tradition at all. Nobody asks you. Some folks are going to church. Some are going to the mosque. Some are going to temple. Some are going to the park. Some are going to the beach. But they all get on the same road trying to get to wherever they are going.

There is a road that runs through this American experience. There is a road that runs through our humanity that ought to connect all of us together, that ought to remind us that we all want our children to thrive and we all want our families to have a future. Let us make haste to that road and walk toward a brighter American future.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

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

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

The Senator from Wisconsin.

SHUTDOWN FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I came to the floor 2 weeks ago with a completely nonpartisan, very sincere attempt with a bill that we call the Shutdown Fairness Act to simply pay the Federal workers whom we were requiring to work, the finest among us: the members of our military, people in Federal law enforcement, TSA, and air traffic controllers to keep our skies safe.

Now, when I was asking the Senate to proceed to that bill, the Senator from Maryland offered an alternative. He called it the True Shutdown Fairness Act. The main difference is that his was only going to be for 1 year. My bill is permanent—permanently stops using Federal employees and the American public as pawns in these sick partisan games.

The other difference was my bill is focusing on the people we are forcing to work. His bill added furloughed workers. So on the floor 2 weeks ago, I said if you are serious about passing this bill, if you are serious about stopping—he said, he can't punish Federal employees for our dysfunction.

If you are serious about that, I told the Senator from Maryland, vote to get on the bill. I will include that; I will convince our conference to include furloughed workers. Get on the bill. We will amend it. We will get this passed, and we will start paying people.

He rejected that offer. Now, we started having discussions. His staff immediately acknowledged the fact that my bill did not in any way, shape, or form

impact the President's authority in terms of determining who was furloughed, who gets included in a reduction in force. It was silent. Even though they falsely accused my bill of giving the President greater authority, it didn't.

I came to the floor again today to pass an amended bill with furloughed workers—by the way, a bill that is now supported by the American Federation of Government Employees—I believe that is the largest public employee union; the Federal Managers Association; the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association; the National Air Traffic Controllers Association—and we are going to have the Senator from Texas come down and talk about what is happening with air travel as we speak; the International Association of Firefighters; and the Association of Flight Attendants. These are public sector unions that generally don't support Republican legislation.

What they particularly like about my bill is the fact that it is permanent. It prevents Federal workers and, quite honestly, the broader American public from being used as pawns again in these sick political games being played right now with their lives.

So, in a few minutes, we are going to proceed to vote on a motion to proceed to my original bill. That is how this works. The leader voted no so he can bring it up for reconsideration. So we have to bring that bill up. We already have the language for the substitute amendment, which includes furloughed workers, that has been vetted by, quite honestly, both Democrat and Republican Senate offices, by the Office of Management and Budget, and by the public sector unions, which have come out in support for it.

This is a bill that is ready for prime time. This is a bill that is ready to be passed tonight. Now, it is unfortunate that we couldn't pass it by unanimous consent because had we done that, the House is on a 48-hour callback, and they will come back. The Speaker has already said they will pass this in the House. And we get our military members, air traffic controllers, these Federal workers who keep us safe—we can get them paid.

So again, I am just asking—I am actually pleading with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to please vote to proceed to this bill. We will substitute an amendment that includes furloughed workers. We can pass this tonight. If we vote to proceed, we can then vote for unanimous consent to waive all time agreements, and we could even pass this yet tonight. Make our skies safer.

But I know the Senator from Alaska has a few words to say, and I know the Senator from Texas will as well.

I yield to the Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, thank you to my colleague from Wisconsin Senator JOHNSON. I have been proud to work with him on this bill over the last couple weeks.

The way this came to the floor—Senator JOHNSON and I were making the case in the conference. I had a bill that actually was a bill about paying our troops. Imagine that—we want to pay our military during a shutdown, including the Coast Guard.

Senator JOHNSON came to me and said: DAN, I have a broader bill. Let's pay everybody who is required to work to keep us safe in America.

I said: Great idea. Let's do it.

So this is the Shutdown Fairness Act. Senator JOHNSON already talked about what it does. It is very, very simple. If you are required to work because your job is important—primarily because you are keeping Americans safe—then you should be paid.

We have a great example right here. All these Capitol Police officers right now keeping us safe right here in the Capitol—they are not getting paid. Air traffic controllers and TSA are keeping us safe right now in America. Senator CRUZ is going to talk about what they have been going through. They are not getting paid. They should be paid. Of course, our military. President Trump has worked magic to keep them getting paid, but that is going to run out soon.

So this is a very simple bill. There is nothing more American than paying people for their hard work, especially when the Federal Government is requiring them to work.

So what happened?

Oh, by the way, Senator JOHNSON mentioned that it is well over 200 groups now. I have a long list of public employee unions, the Teamsters, private sector unions—all kinds of organizations across America are saying to our colleagues on the other side of the aisle: Pass the short-term CR but also pass this bill.

So what happened? When we worked this 2 weeks ago, there were a number of Democrat Senators who came to us and were very interested in doing that because it makes sense. How could you not be interested in doing it?

We can negotiate healthcare and these other issues, but the men and women in the Federal Government who are working without a paycheck—you have been hearing stories about the FAA guy driving an Uber because he has to feed his family. He is not getting paid. And he has a really important job as an air traffic controller.

So we thought our bill was going to pass. A number of Democrat Senators were like: Hey, we agree with this.

That was 2 weeks ago. So what happened? Here is what happened—the same thing that has been happening every night. The minority leader, Senator SCHUMER, and the Democratic leadership are pressuring the other Democrat Senators: Don't do it. Don't do it.

The pressure comes on them. It is happening right now. The pressure comes on.

Don't do it. We have to make sure the left wing of the party is happy.

You heard Senator SCHUMER recently, that "we are winning the shut-

down." I will tell you who is not winning the shutdown—by the way, I have no idea who he is talking about when he says "we," but I will tell you who is not winning the shutdown: the men and women in America who work for the Federal Government who aren't getting a paycheck and are required to work.

So that is what happened last time. Senate Democrats were going to vote for our bill, and the leadership on the Democratic side, because they want to use these people as leverage, convinced them, pressured them not to vote for it.

So I hope my Democrat colleagues, at least nine of you—actually, it is eight of you—have the courage to look at your leader and go: You know what, CHUCK, sorry. I am going to pay the marines. I am going to pay the Navy. I am going to pay the FAA. I am going to pay TSA. And we are certainly not going to use them, as Senator JOHNSON said, as pawns.

Right now, they are being used as pawns.

So here is the deal. To my Democratic colleagues, 2 weeks ago, a number of you were going to do this—we had discussions—and then you kind of got pressured to not.

Show some courage. Walk up and vote with us to pay the men and women in America, Federal workers who are keeping us safe and haven't gotten a paycheck. There is nothing more American than that. Have the courage to do it.

I yield back to my colleague from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. I want to thank the Senator from Alaska. He has been so dedicated. He has been so tenacious in making sure that the finest among us, the men and women of our military, get paid and then, you know, signing on to my effort to broaden this to all Federal employees. Again, as he said, they shouldn't have to go to food banks and they shouldn't have to go to DoorDash to pay their child's tuition or feed their family.

But we had a chilling report from the Senator from Texas, the chair of the Commerce Committee, in terms of what is happening with air traffic control in terms of our skies. But before we turn to the Senator from Texas, the Senator from Wyoming has a few words to speak on this bill.

Ms. LUMMIS. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator JOHNSON for his dedication to trying to pay the Federal workers who are being used in what is a political battle—I want to excuse them from a partisan political battle that is not of their making so they can go back to work and serve the American people.

What we have here is a political standoff between Democrats and Republicans in Congress. It has nothing to do with the air traffic controllers. Some of them are Democrats, and some are Republicans. It has nothing to do with any other essential or furloughed

Federal workers. Some of them are Democrats; some, Republicans.

Some of them probably agreed that we should shut down the government so insurance companies can make billions more dollars off the American taxpayers under ObamaCare. Some of them are Republicans and think that we should open the government and work out this healthcare mess after we open the government. Regardless of that, they are not in a position to make those decisions. We are. We are.

So here we are in the longest shutdown in government history. The Congress is responsible for it. It is political. It is not policy driven. So since we are going to argue about politics and who is winning and who is losing and who is setting themselves up to have the next President or win the midterms instead of worrying about whether the airways are safe, whether WIC is funded, whether SNAP is funded, whether workers are funded, whether the military is funded; since we are going to fight over who is going to win the election a year from now, let's excuse the people who are not responsible for this dysfunction from our dysfunction.

That is what Senator JOHNSON is trying to do.

Now, we all agree, Democrats and Republicans, that this is not fair to Federal workers—people who are in the military, who are air traffic controllers, who are essential, who are furloughed. It is not fair to them. We all agree.

What Senator JOHNSON is doing is finding a way that we can be together on a bipartisan basis, excuse the Federal workers from this mess, let them be paid, and let us go on with our absurd, partisan, political dysfunction if that is what we want.

If we want to fight about healthcare, it is my opinion that we ought to do it after we fully open the government, but if we are not willing to do that, let's at least let the Federal workers off the hook.

I applaud Senator JOHNSON. I applaud Senator SULLIVAN. I applaud Senator CRUZ.

We want to be able to keep Americans safe who are getting in airplanes every day.

We want to keep Americans safe who are working in the military. They don't make very much money, especially those young, first- and second-year military employees. Some of them have young families. Some of them have spouses. So I am telling you, they don't make much money, and then you withhold their pay. Those are the people that are working paycheck to paycheck. Let them out of our political dysfunction. Don't make them suffer for our political misfunction and dysfunction.

I want to also thank any Democrat who will listen and be compassionate towards your Federal workers in your districts.

This is wrong for those of us—whether we disagree about healthcare or not,

whether you want to fund billions of dollars to give to insurance companies for a broken healthcare system—fine.

We can have that debate, but don't penalize the Federal workers for our dysfunction, our disrespect for them.

I yield the floor.

Mr. JOHNSON. I appreciate the remarks from the Senator from Wyoming. I know people are coming down here to vote, but there are no time restrictions, and this is extremely important. We have a number of Senators who want to speak to this issue. We should give them time to speak—hopefully, to convince our colleagues on the other side to, again, be fair: Think about what your vote means to people that don't want to be used as pawns.

I believe, again, that the Senator from Texas, our chairman of the Commerce Committee, he has got some pretty, as I said, chilling information to relate to the American public, based on what is happening, if we do not pay air traffic controllers.

The Senator from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. I thank Senator JOHNSON.

It is day 38 of the Schumer shutdown—the longest government shutdown in the history of the United States.

Now, Senator SCHUMER told the world:

Every day gets better for us.

Senator SULLIVAN asked: Who is the “us”?

I will tell you who the “us” is.

This is a partisan political show. It happened because, in March, the Democrats decided to be reasonable and allow the government to stay open. And the extreme-left wing of the Democrat party got furious, and Senator SCHUMER nearly lost his job.

And now the government is shut down because the Democrats want to show the radical-left wing in their base that they really, really, really hate Donald Trump.

Now, on the Democrat side of the aisle, there is a talking point—a talking point we actually had in the Commerce Committee yesterday. One of our Democrat colleagues said: There is a Republican President. There is a Republican House. This is the Republicans' shutdown.

And I don't know who actually produces those talking points for Democrats, but every one of them, word for word, said the identical thing.

Well, I tell you, I spoke shortly thereafter, and I said: You know, every witness in a court of law, before they testify, they are sworn in, and they are asked that their testimony will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

I said: What my Democrat colleague just did there failed part No. 2, the whole truth.

You are right; there is a Republican President. You are right; there is a Republican House. And you are right;

there is a Republican Senate. What the Democrats also know is that, under the Senate rules, it takes 60 Senators to vote to fund the government. They all know that. That is not something they don't know, and it is not an accident that they don't mention it.

Why do we have a shutdown? Well, let's count. There are 53 desks on this side of the Senate floor. There are 53 Republicans, which means the government cannot be funded until at least 7 Democrats decide we are going to fund the government.

By the way, this is not a new development. When Joe Biden was President, 13 separate times we passed a clean continuing resolution. What does that mean? We had a 60-vote threshold then too. That means Republicans could have done this garbage any of the 13 times under Joe Biden, but we did not. They didn't have 60 votes. What was different when Joe Biden was President is Republicans voted with the Democrats to allow the government to stay open.

And, by the way, in March, the Democrats knew that was the responsible thing to do. It does not take much on the magic Google machine to get video of every one of these Democrats saying on TV: Government shutdowns are reckless. They are irresponsible. They are wrong.

They all know that. But you know what they are counting on? I look up, and the press gallery is virtually empty. They are counting on ABC, NBC, and CBS lying to the American people. They are counting on CNN lying to the American people. They are counting on MSNBC lying to the American people.

This is not complicated. Fourteen times the Republicans on this side of the floor have voted to open the government, and 14 times Democrats have voted to keep the government closed.

And then, after they vote to keep the government closed, the Democrats walk out to the reporters and say: Gosh, I can't believe the Republicans closed the government. That is when a reporter is actually supposed to do something really radical. It is called “report.” The person telling me he or she is upset at the government shutdown, why did you vote 14 times to keep the government shut down?

Now, there are lots of aspects of this that are painful, but there is one in particular that has impacted American families all over the country, which is any family that is traveling—traveling for work, traveling to visit a sick relative, traveling to go to a funeral in a family, traveling to go on a family vacation. There are, right now, over 50,000 TSA agents. Many of them are going to work. They are not getting paid. They missed their paycheck.

There are, right now, more than 14,000 air traffic controllers. Many of them are going to work. None of them are getting paid.

That means they are trying to figure out—their last paycheck didn't come.

They are trying to figure out: How do I pay my mortgage? How do I pay my rent? How do I pay my food? How do I feed my kids? How do I take care of medical bills?

You know what the answer from the Democrats is?

Every day gets better for us.

If you are hurting and not getting a paycheck, Senator SCHUMER's answer—I do appreciate his doing the Mr. Burns tent with his hands. I wish he had started off with “excellent.” But that is, in fact, his quote:

Every day gets better for us.

On Wednesday, there were over 15,000 flight delays. On Wednesday, there were over 600 canceled flights.

Delta Airlines has called on the Democrats: Vote to reopen the government.

United Airlines has called on the Democrats: Vote to reopen the government.

Southwest Airlines has called on the Democrats: Vote to reopen the government.

American Airlines has called on the Democrats: Vote to reopen the government.

The National Air Traffic Controllers Association has called on the Democrats: Vote to reopen the government.

Yesterday, I had a conversation with the Administrator of the FAA. It was chilling. As everyone knows, the FAA announced that it is putting in place a mandatory 10-percent reduction in flights in the 40 largest airports in America. What the Administrator of the FAA told me yesterday on the phone was why, and here is what Administrator Bedford said. He said: Last Friday, which was Halloween, half of the busiest 30 air traffic control facilities were short-staffed. That includes New York, Austin, Newark, Phoenix, Washington, Nashville, Dallas, and Denver.

I want you to listen to this next statistic.

Nearly 80 percent of the air traffic controllers in New York City called out. They did not show up to work—nearly 80 percent. Senator SCHUMER represents New York City. Nearly 80 percent of the controllers called out on Halloween.

There were rampant delays. The FAA said the aggregate data, the whole national air space system, looked OK. But then they deaggregated the data. Looking at the 40 biggest airports, in particular, painted a very different picture.

Here is what the Administrator of the FAA told me: Pilots filed more than 500 voluntary safety reports about air traffic control problems they were encountering—air traffic controllers that were fatigued, that were tired, that were making mistakes.

And what is the Democrats' view? Well, there is an old line that a gaff is when someone in Washington accidentally tells the truth. You heard CHUCK SCHUMER say:

Every day gets better for us.

Here is what one Democrat aide told CNN.

Another senior Democrat aide said as long as public perception is in their favor, the party will not concede short of “planes falling out of the sky.”

That is out of the words of the Democrats themselves.

Let me tell you, as chairman of the Commerce Committee, part of our responsibility is to oversee the FAA and to do everything possible to ensure safety.

Turning to my Democrat colleagues, saying: This is not a joke.

First of all, the shutdown happened because Senator SCHUMER had to demonstrate he was tough so he didn’t get primaried by AOC in New York.

Then the next threshold was the No Kings rallies. They had to show they were tough enough that, when radicals were marching in cities across the country, they were as angry as the blue-haired, angry radicals.

Then we had election day. They were going to keep everything shut down until election day because it energized their base. And then Democrats won elections in the very blue State of New Jersey, the very blue State of Virginia, and the insanely blue city of New York City. And, suddenly, Democrats said: Holy cow. Our really leftwing voters like it when we shut the government down.

Are there any Democrats on that side of the aisle for whom responsibility matters? Or is every one of them proud to say: We will keep it shut down until planes fall out of the sky.

God forbid that comes to pass. Over 500 voluntary safety reports about air traffic controllers. You have got air traffic controllers driving Uber to pay their bills.

And here is the good news. We can resolve it right now. Senator JOHNSON’s bill, that we will vote on in just a few minutes, is very simple. It says: Any Federal worker that goes to work will be paid. If you have to work—if you are a soldier, if you are manning the wall, keeping this country safe, you are being forced to work, you will be paid. If you are a Border Patrol agent, if you are an FBI agent, if you are a TSA agent, and you have to work, you will be paid.

And if you are an air traffic controller and your job is literally keeping, Mr. President, your children and my children safe when they get on an airplane, you will be paid.

And to those in the media who persist in repeating Democrat talking points, understand this: The vote right now, if we vote yes, the air traffic controllers will be paid. If we vote no, the air traffic controllers will not be paid. So every Democrat who votes no is saying: We will not pay the air traffic controllers.

What does that mean? There are roughly 45,000 commercial flights a day in the United States. The 10-percent reduction that the FAA has put in place

will be roughly 5,000 flights a day that will be canceled. Now, if you assume 100 passengers are on each flight—I am a lawyer, not a mathematician. So I am going to make the math simple. So 100 passengers, 500 flights a day, that is more than 500,000 Americans who will have their flight canceled each and every day the Schumer shutdown continues—more than 500,000. And millions more will have their flights delayed.

So it is a simple choice. It is a simple choice. Do you want to pay the air traffic controllers or not?

But I have got to tell you, you had better be ready to talk to your constituents who said: Why was my plane canceled when I was going to see my sick mother?

Well, because I, Democrat, voted against paying air traffic controllers. That is the answer.

You won’t like getting that answer, but I tell you what, that is a lot better answer than if you have to look in the eyes of someone whose family was killed because the Democrats get what they are explicitly asking for, which is planes falling from the sky.

The Schumer shutdown—you are a leftwing, partisan Democrat, you say:

Every day gets better for us.

I will tell you who “us” ain’t. It ain’t the American people.

So do the right thing because every one of you knows it is the right thing. Vote yes. Pay the air traffic controllers, and end this ridiculous shutdown.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. I want to thank Senator CRUZ for his sobering remarks.

This Chamber should be full. It would be nice if our Democratic colleagues were here to listen. I hope they are listening on their TVs in their office.

God, I hope it literally doesn’t take planes falling out of the sky. Tonight, you can continue your shutdown, but you can vote to pay the air traffic controllers so that is far less likely. If you vote no and, God forbid, it actually happens, can you live with yourself?

I came to the floor 2 weeks ago in as nonpartisan a fashion as I possibly could, begging Democrats to pay people that are forced to work that are keeping our skies safe, that are keeping our Nation safe. Two weeks later, we haven’t done it.

This isn’t partisan.

Search your conscience. Ask yourself, honest to God, if a plane, another plane—a plane has fallen out of the sky. I am not saying it is because of air traffic control, but you heard of 500 safety instances. Our air traffic control system is already antiquated. Can you live with yourself if another plane falls out of the sky and more people needlessly die because we are short of air traffic controllers?

I know the Senator from Alaska has a couple more comments. Then we will turn it over to the Senator from Florida.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. I want to thank Senator JOHNSON for coming to the floor and making this very strong case. It is about safety, and it is about the American way. There is nothing more American than paying people for the work that they do. We all know that.

Again, Senator JOHNSON’s bill is a simple bill. It is about paying the Federal workers who are required to work to keep us safe. All these jobs we are talking about are jobs that keep the American people safe.

Of course, the military is a big part of this bill. They epitomize the Federal workers who are keeping us safe, and they epitomize courage. So do many of our Federal workers as well. I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle just show a little bit of the courage that our military displays every day all over the world—just a tiny bit of that courage.

Again, to my Democratic colleagues, we know you are getting a lot of pressure from your leadership. Senator CRUZ did a great job explaining the origins of that. By the way, it has nothing to do with healthcare. It has nothing to do with anything. It has everything to do with appeasing the far left of the Democratic Party, which is rising. So we get that you are under pressure.

But you all know that voting for this bill is the right thing to do. I know my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. They are good people. As Senator JOHNSON just said, have a little bit of conscience and a little bit of courage, the kind of courage that our military displays every day, and vote for the Shutdown Fairness Act right now. Every one of you knows it is the right thing to do. I hope you do it.

Mr. JOHNSON. I thank the Senator from Alaska and yield to the Senator from Florida.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, first thing I want to do is thank all the Senators that are speaking tonight.

I can’t imagine voting not to pay somebody. In my State, here is what is happening. We have people that are not getting food. At church on Sunday, the pastor asked if we would actually bring in a whole bunch of food because they knew because of what the Democrats are doing, people would not get their food stamps. So all the food banks, they need way more food.

I was talking to a reporter today in Tampa. He said the line is unbelievable at one of the food banks he was at in Tampa today. When I think about these people that are not getting their food stamps, I think of my mom. My mom was a mom of five kids. We lived in public housing. I never met my dad. She had to go to markets and stores and ask for food. She never got food stamps, but she had to go ask for food.

Just think about what is going on around our country. There are people right now worried about if they are going to feed a 2-year-old little kid. Can you just imagine what that mom

is doing? I mean, I just can't imagine how anybody ever could vote to shut down the Food Stamp Program to not feed kids.

Let's think about all these people not getting paid. I will give you my experience. When I was 19 years old, I got married. I was E-2 in the Navy, and I was making 332 or 334 bucks a month. That same person today—my wife and I, she was making 75 bucks a week as a legal secretary. So those people, if something like that—I didn't have \$25 in the bank. They wouldn't have said: Oh, it is OK not to pay the rent.

Any costs we had, no one would have said: Oh, don't worry. You don't have to pay it now.

That is what is going on with our military. They have mortgages. Their kids have school costs. Their kids want to play sports. They might have medical bills. And my Democratic colleagues are saying they don't care. I mean, did they ever live that life? Have they ever lived a life where they were worried, paycheck to paycheck, how they were going to pay for food, for the rent, for the mortgage? Do you think all the lenders are going to say: "We know the government is shut down so you don't have to pay your mortgage"?

I just think—I don't know how you could not have a heart to open up government. We can have a policy disagreement every day, and we should. But to not make sure people get their food stamps, not make sure people are showing up today, as Senator CRUZ said, trying to keep us safe in the skies or our military that is trying to keep our freedoms, and the Democrats don't care if they get paid or not—just think about it.

Since I got up here—this is my seventh year—I have had a bill that says No Budget, No Pay. The Democrats have blocked it, including yesterday, because they want to get paid, even though they are making the decision that other people don't get a paycheck. They are not willing to give up any of their pay because, as one of them said, he has a mortgage; why would he be expected to give up his pay? Well, they are doing it every day to all the Federal workers. I just can't imagine doing that.

I say to my Democratic colleagues: Open the government. Pay our workers. Make sure people get food, have food on the table. Don't ever, ever, ever in your wildest dreams do that to people in our country. It is wrong to do what you are doing.

Senator SCHUMER came out and said he had a proposal. It is a joke. It is a complete joke. I will tell you why. Let's think about what they want to do. For us to be able to make sure that we start paying people, they get food stamps, they want to make sure insurance companies continue to get rich. So their proposal doesn't do anything.

Right now, people don't lose their ObamaCare subsidies. It is people that make over 400 percent—that is over probably \$128,000, \$130,000 a year—get

subsidies for their healthcare. You could be a millionaire, you get a subsidy. He wants to make sure millionaires get a subsidy for people possibly to get any food.

He knows Republicans are not going to continue to support a program that pays healthcare for illegals; that is wrong. It has taxpayers paying for abortion; that is wrong. It has taxpayers paying for trans surgery; that is wrong. Making sure—there is supposedly about 4 to 5 million people who don't even know they have these subsidies because it is going directly to an insurance company with no responsibility by a consumer. All you have to do to sign somebody up is know their name, their birth date, their address. Sign them up, and insurance companies get all the money. Why would we ever support something like that?

I want to thank my colleagues. I can't imagine. It is heartless to not make sure people have food. It is heartless to make sure people don't have money if they are working. If the Democrats vote against Senator JOHNSON's simple bill to pay people that are busting their butt to keep our freedoms, to keep us safe, do all these things—I don't know how you can go home and feel good about what you are doing.

I yield the floor.

Mr. JOHNSON. I want to thank the Senator from Florida.

I see the Senator from Michigan. I believe he wants to speak to this bill. We will have the last word.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Let the Chair recognize the Senator from Michigan. Then we can go back to the Senator from Nebraska.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Thank you, Mr. President.

Let me first say that there is something we all agree on, Democrats and Republicans, here in this Chamber. We want Federal employees to be paid. It is simply unacceptable that they have to work and come to work every day, do their job, and not get paid. That is why we have to end this shutdown as quickly as possible, and we are focused on doing that.

But that is not really exactly the total story behind the Johnson bill. I have legislation to pay Federal employees. We could vote on that now. I offered it in a UC request to my colleague from Wisconsin that said we have a bill to pay all Federal employees right now, no strings attached, no language that gives the President more power, more flexibility to do things that we should not want him to do.

But my Republican colleagues don't want to have that bill.

Senator VAN HOLLEN, another colleague of mine, has a bill to pay them that has complete support of Democrats. Let's pay them. We have two bills that if we put them on the floor right now, we could pass. If my Republican friends want to do it, we could pass with 100 votes.

It is my bill, but any of you can sign it. I offer it to my colleague from Wisconsin. It could be your bill. Do it. I don't need any authorship of it. But it is a bill that does exactly what my colleagues across the aisle are saying: just pay Federal employees. That is what it would do, but it was rejected.

Why?

There is a little bit more in this bill. The Johnson bill before us actually creates an unlimited and permanent slush fund for President Trump to use. You are not going to get support here from us to transfer what should be congressional power to be able to determine when we want money spent, and it actually gets spent the way it should be.

It is not about passing a slush fund to the President. The President could justify the transfer of this money elsewhere. This is something, clearly, the administration wants because it will give the White House more power. The bill adds Presidential authority by omitting—it omits the regular safeguards that we include in normal funding bills to ensure that money actually goes where Congress intends.

We have been seeing a lot of that. The President, basically, is just thumbing his nose at Congress every day. Unfortunately, my Republican colleagues say that is OK. If the President doesn't want to listen to the Congress, that is OK with them.

We are a coequal branch of government. We are elected by the people back home to represent our people as Senators. We are not here just to rubberstamp a President.

A lot of my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle, I am surprised at, because there are a lot of really great people that I have a lot of respect for. And yet we see the President constantly run over Congress, and it is crickets on the other side. There is no pushback from my Republican colleagues, either here in the Senate or in the House.

There is actually, in this bill, there is no explicit guarantee or requirement to actually pay out this money. The administration could sit on this appropriation. We are just a blank-check appropriation for employees, but the administration could just sit on it for some particular programs they don't like.

That is why, in a normal appropriations bill, we put in language to prevent that. Granted, the President has been ignoring Congress, but at least we put it in saying these are the rules.

Congress has the power of the purse. It is article I of the Constitution, and yet a lot of my colleagues don't seem to take that to heart.

Most approps bills, including the House's continuing resolution proposal, actually include restrictions on how funding should be used. The Johnson bill includes no restrictions—no restrictions.

We know that Trump has shown that he will abuse the budget process in

very novel ways. He has said that he will refuse to pay backpay to workers even when Congress has explicitly set it. This bill, hopefully, does address that. He has transferred money illegally to pay for his political priorities, and he impounds money whenever he finds any kind of wiggle room to do that.

In a sense, this bill is a Trojan horse. It says that we are going to help Federal employees, but it is really continued power for the President.

I have heard my colleagues say that Federal employees are being used as pawns. That is what this bill does. It is using Federal employees as pawns to give the OMB and the President a whole lot more power to use a slush fund of money in any way he chooses.

We know OMB Director Russ Vought likes this bill. We know what Russ Vought is about. In fact, I think there was a leaked speech that Russ Vought had, and we mentioned this in the committee.

I appreciate my colleagues saying how wonderful Federal workers are, but this is what the OMB Director said, who says this is a really good bill, that the Johnson bill is a really good bill. He said that he wants the bureaucrats to be affected by trauma.

When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains. . . . We want to put them in trauma.

I hope my Republican colleagues called out Mr. Vought when he said that because you care so much about our employees. I appreciate that.

But when folks in the administration say things like this, please say that is wrong; that we really do care about you—not when you are trying to put a bill forward that is going to give the President an unlimited slush fund.

Let's be real. If you want to pay employees, which I hope you do, and if you want to move forward, then take a bill that we know has the kind of guardrails that our appropriations bills normally do to make sure the money is actually spent as we intend in Congress, which is the way it is supposed to work under article I of the Constitution.

I still believe in the Constitution. I still believe that we are a coequal branch of government, that we are not simply a rubberstamp for the President. If we don't change that way, that is how you lose the checks and balances that our Founders cared so deeply about.

You know, as our Founders were debating the Constitution, they didn't trust any of us. They knew; they were politicians too. They knew you couldn't trust anybody. So they figured: We are going to have three branches. We are going to have the judiciary check the Congress and the President. The Congress will check the Presidential power.

Article I is the Congress. They thought the Congress was the most im-

portant one. But they kind of assumed that the Congress would actually exercise its power and check Presidential power, not just hand more to him with a smile and then use a false pretext in order to give that money. So that is what this bill is about.

You know, I have tried to work with Senator JOHNSON, and I will always want to work with him. We have worked on a number of bills together. We have language.

Again, of the bills we have that I have introduced, which is the Military and Federal Employee Protection Act—a straight, clean bill. They talk about union support. Every union has supported my legislation. Every union has supported Senator VAN HOLLEN's.

We are now getting unions. Unions are starting to read the fine print on this bill right now. We have AFSCME that has now come out against it. We have the SEIU that has just come out against it. We have the AFL-CIO that has just come out against it. We have the IFPTE that is just coming out. I guess our union friends are going to read the language of this bill and are going to be like: Oh, we should have read the fine print.

Like, yes, it is really important to read the fine print.

So we can't support this bill. We can support a bill that pays all of our employees, but it has got to be one that has the types of protections we have in every other appropriations bill we try to pass out of this body.

So I am going to oppose this, but hopefully we can find a way to work together. We have two bills ready to go that we could pass today, but with this bill, we are going to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I am not quite sure what planet the Senator from Michigan comes from, but here on planet Earth, when you read the actual language of the bill, none of these phantom provisions exist in there. But I will go through those point for point before we call for the final vote.

Right now, I think the Senator from Nebraska has a few points he wants to make.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, earlier today, we heard about an offer from the minority leader. It shows just how unserious he and the Democrats are. That offer is full of horse hockey. It has things in it that Republicans cannot accept, and he knows it.

My colleague from Michigan, the Democrat from Michigan, was just talking about power because that is what it is about. He mentioned power.

A number of other folks have talked about leverage. They need to have this shutdown for leverage. A number of Democrats have said this.

But what I am here today to talk about are people; not leverage, not power—people—air traffic controllers.

These are letters that I have received from air traffic controllers—hand-

written letters—that are talking about what they are going through right now because of the minority leader's shutdown. Let me just read you some of these.

My wife suffers from a chronic autoimmune disease that without her medication would cripple her. Our monthly copay for her specialty medication is \$2,800 a month. We have less than 2 weeks before her next round of medication is due. Our situation is not sustainable even with pulling money from our savings.

That was from one of our air traffic controllers in Nebraska.

Here is another one:

Each shutdown gets harder than the last. The mental stress of the unknown gets harder each time. With my growing family and medical bills for my family, it gets harder every time. Both of my children have neurobiological disorders that require constant monitoring and medical care. I take pride in my job and the service we provide here at Omaha Approach control. As a patriot and veteran, I take my Federal oath . . . seriously. I will always continue to do my job [and] keep the skies safe and expeditious.

Here is another one:

Myself and my family, to include my 3-year-old daughter, are struggling to make ends meet. I now have to decide between putting food on the table, paying my mortgage, paying [my] car note, and many other things . . . I need to survive.

Are the Democrats deaf? Do they not hear from the people who are put in these situations?

This is their shutdown. This is their Biden budget they are not voting for. They voted for this 14 times over the last 19 months, and now they won't because their far-left wing tells them not to. We have patriots here who are suffering.

Why don't they show some of the courage that these people are and stand up to the far-left wing and vote for this bill so at least the people who are working can get paid? Is that so much to ask—that we pay the people who are actually trying to keep the skies safe?

A Democrat staffer was earlier quoted as saying we are going to do this “until planes start falling from the sky.” Well, folks, we already heard that the FAA is going to cut back 10 percent this week on the number of flights because of safety concerns.

But it is the people—the air traffic controllers and our law enforcement and everybody else who is working in a Federal job who is not getting paid—who are paying the price for the minority leader's shutdown.

I yield to my colleague from Wisconsin.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments from the Senator from Nebraska.

I think the Senator from Utah would also like to speak to the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I want to commend my friend and colleague the

Senator from Wisconsin for his outstanding work on this bill, the Shutdown Fairness Act.

Senator JOHNSON seized on something very important here. We are surrounded by people in this very building and throughout the United States and across the globe—people who are faithfully, valiantly working for the U.S. Government. Now, some of them are staffers in this very room who are not being paid. Some of them are the Capitol Police officers we greeted on our way in who are keeping the Capitol Complex safe. Some of these are soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, guardsmen all over the world who are serving the U.S. Government at risk of life and limb to keep us safe, and there are countless others in different occupations who are not being paid.

Why? Well, they are not being paid because our friends on the other side of the aisle are wanting to expand government yet again. They may think that this is the right message, that this is a winning message. It is not. It is not the right message. It is not a winning message even for them because it highlights something. It highlights the danger in putting too much trust, too many responsibilities, too many functions in the U.S. Government—so much so that when a crisis like this emerges, and the Schumer shutdown now drags well into its second month, they see that what the American people have previously regarded as a service performed by the government to them is now being held over them to extort even more money out of them under the threat of planes falling from the sky.

We are told by Democrat after Democrat on television interviews and elsewhere: Well, it is OK. It is OK because this is leverage. This is our leverage.

Well, what do they want to use that leverage for? They want to use it so as to paper over the failures—the abject failures—of ObamaCare, this law that has succeeded in doing exactly one thing: enriching large health insurance companies while making all Americans poorer. Premiums have skyrocketed. Coverage has diminished. Quality has completely tanked as a result. They know this. They understand this. They see premiums continuing to increase year after year after year.

So what do they want to do with it? Well, they want to spend a lot more money moving forward—money at a time when the U.S. Government is already \$38 trillion in debt; money to hide, to conceal what it is that ObamaCare is doing to the American people, when, in fact, what ObamaCare has done is diminish the healthcare options that the American people have.

It used to be that you could negotiate with a health insurance company and buy a health insurance policy, but ObamaCare, in many ways, made what was once health insurance illegal.

We need to make health insurance legal again. We need to allow a willing customer to pay a willing insurer for a

health insurance policy rather than an ObamaCare health plan, which very often, through its Byzantine labyrinth of Federal regulations, just adds to the cost and adds to the profit, the bottom line of these huge healthcare companies.

So, yes, they want to take this to extort the American people and their position of vulnerability at a time when we are told planes may start falling from the sky; at a time when people's airplane tickets are being rendered valueless because a lot of these flights are not going to be able to be made. And all kinds of other problems are happening while, at the same time, our Federal workforce is not being paid.

These are not the right people to punish for the failures of ObamaCare. Don't let them carry that burden. Don't make them do it. They didn't do this to the American people; ObamaCare did.

Let's fix ObamaCare. Let's make it legal again to have health insurance—actual health insurance, not that sort of bastardized form of health insurance that has emerged from ObamaCare's endless regulations that have resulted in diminished quality, lower coverage, and endlessly higher premiums.

This shutdown has gone on long enough. This shutdown should come to an end, and it should come to an end by the very generous offer made by Republicans time and time and time again to continue at spending levels that, until just months ago, were the Democrats' own spending levels. It is not enough for them.

We have got to end the madness and end the shutdown.

At the very least, even if we are not to end the shutdown, we should pass Senator JOHNSON's bill. We should do that tonight. We should do it right now because regardless of what you think we ought to do with ObamaCare or any other aspect of government, these workers who have now gone for some time without a paycheck should not be required to make this sacrifice, especially when you consider what it is for—hiding the true cost of ObamaCare. That is shameful.

Again, I thank and I commend Senator JOHNSON and his team for putting together this legislation. I am proud to support it, I wholeheartedly endorse it, and I plead with my colleagues to vote for it.

Let's get these workers paid. They deserve nothing else.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. I want to thank the Senator from Utah for his remarks.

Mr. President, I don't want to spend time refuting all of the misrepresentations from the Senator from Michigan in terms of what phantom provisions he claims are in my bill. There is no slush fund. It is completely silent on Presidential authority. I know some people want to reduce authority, but that is a bill that won't be signed. If you want to pay the Federal workers,

if you want to stop punishing them for our dysfunction, if you want to stop using them as pawns in this political game, that is a demand you have to drop.

The money appropriated in this bill will go to pay workers. That also is a false argument.

But if you are not quite satisfied with the language, which has been out there—and we have been trying to work and get feedback for 2 weeks, and we have gotten excellent feedback from leadership, from discussions on both sides of the aisle, from OMB, trying to perfect this thing—the solution is get on the bill. Get on the bill and offer an amendment. Keep talking to us. Don't close it down.

We heard from a number of our Republican colleagues. We heard from the Senator from Michigan. Obviously, passions are running high. But there is a great deal of frustration, certainly, on our side when the other side simply won't take yes for an answer.

I came down here 2 weeks ago in as nonpartisan a stance as I possibly could be because, as the Senator from Michigan stated, we all agree that these people ought to be paid. So the way to do that is not to offer a bill on unanimous consent that has no chance of being signed into law; the way to do that is to vote to proceed tonight to this bill.

If we could iron out our differences, we could yield back time and get this thing passed that the Speaker of the House has already said he would come back and pass. We are so close.

I realize there may be hard partisans. I know there are liberal unions that have now come out against us. But the bulk of the public sector unions are for it. They prefer my bill over anything else. They may also support it because this is permanent. This ends using the Federal workforce and, quite honestly, the American public as pawns in these partisan games for all time. Again, the American Federation of Government Employees, the Federal Managers Association, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association—again, I hope our Democratic colleagues listened to Senator CRUZ's chilling and sobering remarks just a few minutes ago; the International Association of Fire Fighters; and the Association of Flight Attendants.

This bill has support because it makes so much sense. It is fair.

We had three Democrats join us 2 weeks ago. There are two other Democrats who have voted for the House CR. That brings us up to a total of 58. Now, we voted against this because we didn't have furloughed workers. We have added furloughed workers. So hopefully those two will join us.

I have talked to enough Democrat Senators trying to get their input, trying to get this passed. I know there are Democrat Senators who want to vote for this bill, who can vote for this bill.

So putting all partisanship aside, again, I want to appeal to your better

angels. Search your conscience. Sign on to the bill. Vote for a bill that ends using Federal workers and the American public as pawns.

The Senator from Maryland said last week: Let's not punish Federal workers for our dysfunction.

I think my closing argument has to be to go back to what the Senator from Texas was talking about—the air traffic controllers and that situation. Five hundred safety issues were reported recently in our skies.

Search your conscience. Can you imagine—I mean, honestly, think about it. Imagine what the one Democrat staffer said: We are going to cling to this until planes fall out of the sky.

Think about how you would feel if, God forbid, a plane—another plane—fell out of the sky and people died. How could you live with yourself?

Now, again, you can continue the shutdown. I mean, that is your political choice. You can continue to vote against the very reasonable House continuing resolution. But you can still vote to pay Federal workers. You can vote to make sure that air traffic controllers get back to their stations and keep our skies as safe as possible. You can vote to dramatically reduce the chance that a plane will fall out of the sky. We just need two more of you; two more of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle who are working with, quite honestly, folks on this side, trying to end the shutdown; just two of those whom I spoke to that I thought would vote for this. I am begging you—two more.

Let's get on this bill. Let's pay Federal workers. Let's make our Nation safer. Let's do the fair thing. Let's do the right thing. Let's vote to proceed to this bill and get it passed.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

WITHDRAWAL OF MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I withdraw my motion to proceed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The motion is withdrawn.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

SHUTDOWN FAIRNESS ACT—Motion to Proceed to the Motion to Reconsider

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to the motion to reconsider the vote on cloture on the motion to proceed to S. 3012.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote on cloture on the motion to proceed to S. 3012.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the

Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 191, S. 3012, a bill to appropriate funds for pay and allowances of excepted Federal employees for periods of work performed during a lapse in appropriations, and for other purposes.

John Thune, Ted Budd, Katie Boyd Britt, Ron Johnson, Roger Marshall, Tommy Tuberville, Jon A. Husted, Bernie Moreno, David McCormick, Roger F. Wicker, Rick Scott of Florida, Pete Ricketts, Steve Daines, Joni Ernst, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Shelley Moore Capito, Mike Rounds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the mandatory quorum call under rule XXII has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to S. 3012, a bill to appropriate funds for pay and allowances of excepted Federal employees for periods of work performed during a lapse in appropriations, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close, upon reconsideration?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), and the Senator from Alabama (Mr. TUBERVILLE).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN) is necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 53, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 609 Leg.]

YEAS—53

Banks	Grassley	Mullin
Barrasso	Hagerty	Murkowski
Blackburn	Hawley	Ossoff
Boozman	Hoeven	Paul
Britt	Husted	Ricketts
Budd	Hyde-Smith	Risch
Capito	Johnson	Rounds
Cassidy	Justice	Schmitt
Collins	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Cotton	Lankford	Scott (SC)
Cramer	Lee	Sheehy
Crapo	Luján	Sullivan
Cruz	Lummis	Thune
Curtis	Marshall	Tillis
Daines	McConnell	Warnock
Ernst	McCormick	Wicker
Fischer	Moody	Young
Graham	Moreno	

NAYS—43

Alsobrooks	Hickenlooper	Sanders
Baldwin	Hirono	Schatz
Bennet	Kaine	Schiff
Blumenthal	Kelly	Schumer
Blunt Rochester	Kim	Shaheen
Booker	King	Slotkin
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Smith
Coons	Markey	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warren
Durbin	Murray	Welch
Gallego	Padilla	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Peters	
Hassan	Reed	
Heinrich	Rosen	Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Cornyn
Fetterman

Moran

Tuberville

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). On this vote, the yeas are 53, the nays are 43.

Three-fifths of the Senate, duly chosen and sworn, having not voted in the affirmative, the motion upon reconsideration is not agreed to.

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Madam 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.

ARMS SALES NOTIFICATION

Mr. RISCH. Madam President, section 36(b) of the Arms Export Control Act requires that Congress receive prior notification of certain proposed arms sales as defined by that statute. Upon such notification, the Congress has 30 calendar days during which the sale may be reviewed. The provision stipulates that, in the Senate, the notification of proposed sales shall be sent to the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In keeping with the committee's intention to see that relevant information is still available to the full Senate, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the notifications that have been received. If the cover letter references a classified annex, then such an annex is available to all Senators in the office of the Foreign Relations Committee, room SD-423.

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

DEFENSE SECURITY
COOPERATION AGENCY,
Washington, DC.

Hon. MIKE JOHNSON,
Speaker of the House,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(5)(C) of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), as amended, we are forwarding Transmittal No. 25-1R. This notification relates to enhancements or upgrades from the level of sensitivity of technology or capability described in the Section 36(b)(1) AECA certification 17-12 of June 23, 2017.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL F. MILLER,
Director.

Enclosure.

DEFENSE SECURITY
COOPERATION AGENCY,
Washington, DC.

Hon. JAMES E. RISCH,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations,
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(5)(C) of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), as

amended, we are forwarding Transmittal No. 25-1R. This notification relates to enhancements or upgrades from the level of sensitivity of technology or capability described in the Section 36(b)(1) AECA certification 17-12 of June 23, 2017.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL F. MILLER,
Director.

Enclosure.

DEFENSE SECURITY
COOPERATION AGENCY,
Washington, DC.

Hon. BRIAN MAST,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(5)(C) of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), as amended, we are forwarding Transmittal No. 25-1R. This notification relates to enhancements or upgrades from the level of sensitivity of technology or capability described in the Section 36(b)(1) AECA certification 17-12 of June 23, 2017.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL F. MILLER,
Director.

Enclosure.

TRANSMITTAL NO. 25-1R

Report of Enhancement or Upgrade of Sensitivity of Technology or Capability (Sec. 36(b)(5)(C), AECA)

(i) Prospective Purchaser: Government of Australia.

(ii) Sec. 36(b)(1), AECA Transmittal No.: 17-12.

Date: June 23, 2017.

Implementing Agency: Air Force.

(iii) Description: On June 23, 2017, Congress was notified by congressional certification transmittal number 17-12 of the possible sale, under Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, of up to five (5) Gulfstream G-550 aircraft modified to integrate Airborne Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Electronic Warfare (AISREW) mission systems, Global Positioning System (GPS) capability, secure communications, aircraft defensive systems; spares, including whole life costs of airborne and ground segments; aircraft modification and integration; ground systems for data processing and crew training; ground support equipment; publications and technical data; U.S. Government and contractor engineering, technical and logistics support services; flight test and certification; and other related elements of logistical and program support. The estimated total cost was \$1.3 billion. Major Defense Equipment (MDE) constituted \$0.04 billion of this total.

On August 26, 2020, Congress was notified by Congressional certification transmittal number 20-0J of Australia's request for the inclusion of the following non-MDE items and services: spares and repair/return parts; consumables and support equipment; publications and technical documentation; maintenance, training and training equipment; U.S. Government and contractor flight test and certification, aircraft modification and integration, engineering, technical and logistics support services; and other related elements of logistical and program support. These additional items resulted in an increase in non-MDE cost of \$500 million, causing a revised total cost for non-MDE of \$1.76 billion. Major Defense Equipment (MDE) remained \$0.04 billion. The total estimated case value increased by \$500 million to \$1.8 billion.

This transmittal notifies the addition of the following non-MDE items: follow-on sustainment support of the Royal Australian Air Force's Gulfstream G-550 aircraft modi-

fied with airborne intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and electronic warfare (AISREW) mission systems; and other related elements of logistics and program support. The estimated total cost of the new items is \$230 million. The estimated total case will increase by \$230 million to a revised \$2.03 billion. There is no MDE associated with this sale.

(iv) Significance: The proposed sale will support Australia's efforts to modernize its electronic warfare support capability and increase interoperability between the U.S. Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force.

(v) Justification: This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States. Australia is one of the most important U.S. allies in the Western Pacific. The strategic location of this political and economic power contributes significantly to ensuring peace and economic stability in the region. It is vital to the U.S. national interest to assist our ally in developing and maintaining a strong and ready self-defense capability.

(vi) Date Report Delivered to Congress: November 7, 2025.

S.J. RES. 80

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to reject the Biden administration's sweeping plan to lock down nearly half of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska to responsible oil and gas development in contradiction to congressional mandates. I urge my colleagues to support the Alaska delegation's joint resolution of disapproval, S.J. Res. 80, to protect Alaska's rights and future.

The implementation of the Biden administration's National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, NPR-A, Integrated Activity Plan, IAP, Record of Decision, ROD, locks away more than 6 million acres previously made available for responsible oil and gas leasing and restricts infrastructure across 8 million acres—completely undermining the intent of Congress and ignoring the needs and input of local residents. Passing this joint resolution will disapprove this Record of Decision and revert management of the NPR-A back to the previously approved Integrated Activity Plan promulgated during the first Trump administration.

I have long said that Alaskans are some of the foremost conservationists in the world, with a long-standing record of balancing conservation with responsible resource and infrastructure development. Our oil fields on Alaska's North Slope offer a world-class example of what it means to responsibly produce energy in a harsh and demanding environment. The environmentally conscious way in which Alaskans have applied cutting-edge technology is second to none, utilizing ice roads and a winter construction season to minimize impact on Alaska's tundra.

Because of the opportunities provided by oil and gas operations, this industry has provided thousands of good-paying jobs to Alaskans. It has become the primary driver of my State's economy. Oil and gas revenues fund education, essential infrastructure, and community services across the State, making

responsible resource development truly a matter of life or death for Alaskans. In 1954, the Interior Department, with the help of the University of Pittsburgh, conducted a study of the health of Alaska Natives. Many of our communities in rural Alaska all had some of the lowest levels of life expectancy in the entire world. Between 1980 and 2014, the average lifespan increased by 13 years across the region, largely due to oil and gas revenue providing the opportunity to install what we consider to be basic and essential community infrastructure. To say these operations have had a positive impact on the local communities is a gross understatement.

The North Slope of Alaska contains some of the greatest hydrocarbon potential of any place on the planet. It is home to the Prudhoe Bay oil field, the largest conventional oil field in North America, which has produced over 13 billion barrels of oil since production began in 1977. On either side of Prudhoe Bay are two Federal areas, one being the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the other being the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, the subject of today's legislation. The U.S. Geological Survey this year reported that half of the estimated undiscovered technically recoverable oil lying below Federal lands was in Alaska, 14 billion barrels of it being on the North Slope of Alaska. Importantly, the North Slope of Alaska is also the ancestral lands of the Inupiat people, who have lived, subsisted, and called the Arctic home for thousands of years. This is an area the size of Minnesota, wholly above the Arctic Circle, with none of the communities connected by a permanent road system, necessitating all supplies needing to be flown or barged in. Like much of rural Alaska, it has some of the highest costs of living anywhere in the Nation.

The discovery of Prudhoe Bay in 1968 could not have come at a more crucial time for the United States, which was right at the height of the Arab Oil Embargo. The barrels of crude oil from Prudhoe and subsequent North Slope discoveries have helped ensure the American people are not held hostage by adversarial powers seeking to use energy as a tool of coercion. The discovery of Prudhoe Bay did not come in a vacuum. In fact, it was long known that the North Slope of Alaska had oil potential. In the early 1900s, as the U.S. Navy began transitioning from coal to oil-burning engines, the Federal Government became increasingly concerned about the supply of oil reserves in the event of war or national emergency. In response, the Federal Government made multiple withdrawals of public land to ensure a stockpile of fuel supplies for the Navy remained available. The largest of these reserves was on the Alaska North Slope and was designated by President Warren G. Harding in 1923 as the Naval Petroleum Reserve Numbered 4, Alaska.

Following the discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay and the ongoing oil embargo, Congress passed the 1976 Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act, NPRPA, transferring jurisdiction of the Reserve from the Navy to the Department of the Interior and redesignating the area as the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, a 23-million-acre area roughly the size of Indiana. A 1980 amendment to the NPRPA directed the Secretary of the Interior to undertake “an expeditious program of competitive leasing of oil and gas” in the NPR-A and also set up revenue sharing provision between the Federal Government and the State of Alaska that prioritized the subdivisions of the State most directly severely impacted by oil and gas development, ensuring the people who live in Alaska could provide for essential services.

While initial interest in the NPR-A was tepid, new oil finds closer to the NPR-A boundaries led to a number of successful lease sales generating millions of dollars in Federal revenues. Among the most successful was the 2016 lease sale, which came following the discovery of the Willow field. The Bureau of Land Management, BLM, estimates the Willow Project will produce 576 million barrels of oil and non-gas liquids over 30 years and generate \$5.9 billion in revenue for the Federal Government through 2053.

In 2012, the Obama administration, issued the first integrated activity plan, IAP, addressing management for the entire NPR-A, but only made available 11.8 million acres of the Reserve for oil and gas leasing. Beginning in 2017, during the first Trump administration, the Department of the Interior took steps to revise the IAP and Environmental Impact Statement, EIS, that would strike an appropriate balance of promoting development while protecting surface resources as was required in the NPRPA. In December 2020, BLM released the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska Integrated Activity Plan Record of Decision, the culmination of thousands of comments, over a dozen public meetings, and the continuous involvement of the North Slope Borough, the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, the State of Alaska, and relevant Federal Agencies. The RECORD of Decision selected an alternative that made available an additional 6.8 million acres, for a total of 18.6 million acres or 82 percent of the NPR-A’s subsurface estate, available for oil and gas leasing while ensuring lands were made available for pipelines and other essential oil and gas infrastructure and community infrastructure. The 2020 plan also provided important protections for surface resources, particularly subsistence uses by providing adequate protection for sensitive bird populations and the Teshekpuk and Western Arctic Caribou Herds. All in all, it was a phenomenal achievement by some very dedicated BLM employees and an example of Federal Agencies working hand-in-hand

with Alaskans to understand our unique conditions, producing results that protect both our environment and our way of life.

However, following the 2020 election, President Biden announced plans to immediately review all Agency actions taken during President Trump’s term, and the Department of the Interior identified the 2020 IAP/EIS as warranting review, one of the 70 Executive actions the Biden administration took targeting Alaska. BLM determined that the existing 2020 IAP/EIS and associated evaluations were adequate, and no additional analysis was necessary for the Department to select a different alternative from the range analyzed. In April 2022, BLM released a new record of decision that selected the No Action Alternative identified in the 2020 IAP that effectively reverted management of the NPR-A back to the Obama administration’s 2013 IAP ROD. The Biden IAP greatly expanded special areas within the Reserve, prohibiting leasing on 11 million acres or 48 percent of the Reserve, and prohibited infrastructure on approximately 8.3 million acres. The ROD altered and expanded the Special Areas designated under the NPRPA and established performance-based required operating procedures and lease stipulations that applied to oil and gas leasing and development and to some non-oil and gas activities within the Reserve. It is this sweeping plan by the Biden administration that the passage of this joint resolution would invalidate.

I have long said that when we shut down production in Alaska, we weaken America’s hand on the global stage. Every time the Federal Government curtails the production of oil and gas in Alaska, it strengthens the position of OPEC and our adversaries while undermining America’s geostrategic leverage, the very outcome Congress sought to prevent by opening up the NPR-A in the first place.

The issuance of Biden’s new highly restrictive IAP was widely condemned as egregious by Alaskans. Our entire Alaska congressional delegation slammed the decision as contrary to good science, in contravention of congressional directives in Federal law, and foolish, as the Biden administration implored OPEC+ members to produce more oil. Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy said the plan “is another sign of the federal government turning its back on Alaska and hampering domestic energy production.” The Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, ASRC, one of the 12 land-owning Alaska Native corporations created under the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, ANCSA, and representing the interests of more than 13,000 Inupiat shareholders, echoed those concerns. In testimony before the Alaska Legislature, ASRC Vice President of External Affairs Bridget Anderson explained, “despite our sustained efforts and our willingness to work with the federal government, our perspectives

are often drowned out by entities who have no ties to our region nor have any understanding of the nuances of the ANCSA model of indigenous representation. The choice by members of Congress and the administration to overlook our voices is not only frustrating, it is insulting.” The Alaska Legislature passed a resolution unopposed, sponsored by the legislator representing the North Slope, an Inupiat himself, urging BLM to maximize the area available for oil and gas leasing and development in the NPR-A and to take into account the long history of safe and responsible oil and gas development on the North Slope. All these Alaskan voices were ignored.

Importantly, my joint resolution is supported by the North Slope Regional Trilateral, which is made up of the elected leaders of the North Slope Borough, the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, which is the regional tribe, and ASRC. The members of the North Slope Regional Trilateral voiced their opposition to the Biden administration’s overbearing restrictions during his 4 years in office. Yet, despite their opposition, they were ignored—a repeated offense of the Biden administration, who repeatedly disregarded Alaska Native voices. In fact, North Slope leaders from my State flew thousands of miles eight separate times to DC to request a meeting with Secretary of the Interior Haaland to oppose her lock-up of the North Slope. Eight times, she refused to meet with them. The Trilateral’s letter of support for the disapproval resolution notes that the 2022 IAP put in place by the Biden administration imposes “sweeping restrictions that curtail responsible development, undermine congressional intent, and disregard the well-being of the people who depend on these lands for both subsistence and livelihoods” and “disregards the economic needs of North Slope communities, and creates unnecessary obstacles to infrastructure, energy, and community health across the North Slope of Alaska.”

Fortunately, elections have consequences, and on his first day in office of his second term, President Trump signed Executive Order 14153, “Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential,” which called for the rescission of the 2022 Integrated Activity Plan Record of Decision and a reimplementation of the IAP issued by the first Trump administration in 2020. This past summer, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum flew to Alaska and held a townhall on the North Slope with regional leaders and listened to their concerns, showing respect for the Alaska Native people who live there. Under his leadership, he has already advanced steps to rescind Biden’s other disastrous restriction on the NPR-A: the 2024 Management and Protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska final rule.

In March of this year, Alaska’s congressional delegation requested that

the Government Accountability Office, GAO, determine whether the 2022 NPR-A IAP ROD constituted a “rule” under the Congressional Review Act, CRA. GAO issued its legal opinion in July concluding that the 2022 NPR-A IAP ROD is a rule under the Administrative Procedures Act and subject to the CRA and congressional disapproval, the action we are taking with S.J. Res. 80.

Further, this Congress has already taken decisive steps to unlock the NPR-A. In the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” P.L. 119-21, Congress mandated lease sales to be offered under the same terms and conditions set forth in the 2020 IAP. Passage of S.J. Res. 80 would durably protect against another rogue administration promulgating a substantially similar anti-development management plan for the NPR-A as contained in the 2022 IAP ROD.

In addition to the Trilateral, this resolution of disapproval is supported by the Alaska Support Industry Alliance, the Alaska Oil and Gas Association, the Resource Development Council for Alaska, Citizens for Responsible Energy Solutions, the American Exploration and Production Council, the National Federation of Independent Business, the American Petroleum Institute, Americans for Prosperity, the Alaska Chamber, as well as by the Trump administration.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD a letter from the Resource Development Council for Alaska, dated October 30, 2025, expressing strong support for S.J. Res. 80 and H.J. Res. 124.

I urge my colleagues to reject unlawful regulatory overreach, reinforce American energy dominance, uphold Federal law, and listen to Alaska Native voices by supporting the Alaska congressional delegation and voting for this joint resolution of disapproval and rescinding this Record of Decision.

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

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL,
Anchorage, Alaska, October 30, 2025.

Re Support for S.J. Res. 80/H.J. Res. 124.

Hon. Senator LISA MURKOWSKI,
Washington, DC.

Hon. Congressman NICK BEGICH,
Washington, DC.

Hon. Senator DAN SULLIVAN,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR MURKOWSKI, SENATOR SULLIVAN, AND CONGRESSMAN BEGICH: The Resource Development Council for Alaska (RDC) writes in support of S.J. Res. 80 and H.J. Res. 124 to disapprove the BLM’s 2022 NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan Record of Decision. RDC strongly supports these joint resolutions and urges Congress’s and the President’s swift action to reject this misguided and harmful planning decision.

RDC is a statewide, non-profit trade association founded in 1975. Our membership is comprised of individuals and companies from Alaska’s fishing, tourism, forestry, mining, and oil and gas industries and includes Alaska Native corporations, local communities, organized labor, and industry support firms. RDC’s purpose is to encourage a strong, diversified private sector in Alaska and expand the state’s economic base through the responsible development of our natural resources.

The 23 million acres contained in the NPR-A were set aside by the federal government in 1923, and directed by Congress in the Naval Petroleum Reserves Act of 1976, specifically for natural resource development, balanced with conservation, to promote America’s national security through energy resources, and it is an asset to the State of Alaska. Responsible development in the NPR-A supports our nation’s energy security, well-paying jobs and economic benefits for local Alaska Native communities and the state as a whole. The 2022 BLM ROD improperly limits future oil and gas lease sales and development to occur by creating a presumption against future permitting. This is a bad policy that does not support Alaska Native communities, organized labor, or our energy independence.

Given the outstanding track record of the oil and gas industry in the Alaska Arctic, as well as the technological advances of the past 40 years, RDC supports an IAP for NPR-A that reopens all of NPR-A’s subsurface historically available to oil and gas leasing with reasonable and economically feasible stipulations that do not discourage the development and transport of energy resources.

The 2022 BLM IAP ROD unnecessarily prohibits leasing and development of potentially oil-rich lands in much of the NPR-A. This is a clear example of agency overreach and will only discourage responsible resource development and America’s energy independence. As RDC has emphasized numerous times before, the NPR-A is a petroleum reserve with a proven record where surface resources and subsistence can be protected without unduly restricting highly prospective areas to leasing.

Decades of oil and gas activity on the North Slope clearly demonstrate industry can operate in the Arctic while maintaining the highest standards of safety and environmental sensitivity. New advances in technology have greatly reduced the footprint of development, allowing for greater consolidation of facilities and the preservation of more acreage within development zones for wildlife habitat. For example, as much as 60-plus square miles can now be developed from a single 12 to 14 acre gravel drill site. New drilling capabilities are being developed that may increase the subsurface development possible from the same size drill site to as much as 150-plus square miles. The net effect is an everdecreasing impact on surface resources.

The discovery and development of new oil and gas deposits will benefit Alaska and local communities. State and local revenues derived from production will help sustain important services. New industry activity will also provide thousands of job opportunities, boost the local, state, and national economy, and help refill the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS). Development of new energy deposits will also reduce reliance on imported oil and help maintain American energy dominance.

Given the NPR-A was specifically designated by Congress to produce critical energy resources, it is important the BLM continues to provide access to prospects with the highest potential. That is why this SJR 80 and HJR 124 are so critical to reverse the overreach of BLM’s 2022 NPR-A IAP record of decision.

RDC is concerned with the alarming trend from the last administration of “locking up” oil-rich lands in NPR-A and providing for less leasing and less access. Much of the most prospective acreage could be removed from leasing under the 2022 ROD, including those closest to potential future production. To much protest and lack of adequate con-

sultation, the BLM’s 2022 IAP record of decision for the NPR-A did just this—locking up highly prospective areas and layering surface protections prohibitive to leasing or development.

On a related note, attached to this letter of support is a copy of RDC’s comments to the 2023 BLM Proposed Rule for the Management and Protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, 43 CFR Part 2360, RIN 1004-AE95, dated December 7, 2023. While this rule is currently under consideration for rescission pursuant to Executive Order 14153 and Department of Interior Secretarial Order 3422, related to “Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential,” (which RDC fully supports) we hope these comments help you and your staff with historical context for building support for these CRA’s to disapprove the BLM’s 2022 NPR-A IAP record of decision.

CONCLUSION

RDC appreciates your leadership introducing S.J. Res. 80 and H.J. Res. 124 and moving forward with disapproval of the BLM’s 2022 NPR-A IPA Record of Decision. The 2022 ROD went too far and does not properly follow the intent and purpose for the NPR-A and mandated by Congress.

A CRA disapproving the 2022 ROD for the NPR-A IAP will ensure federal lands in Alaska are open for business and help demonstrate energy dominance for the United States. The ability to develop new energy deposits in NPR-A will benefit Alaska, local communities, and the nation. Revenues derived from new production will also help sustain important state services. Industry activity will provide new job opportunities for local residents and others while boosting the economy. Increased access to NPR-A can be accommodated without sacrificing the traditional ways of life, especially the subsistence needs of Alaska residents in the Arctic. Ensuring the NPR-A is open for future lease sales will maintain America’s energy dominance and reduce foreign imports.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue of vital importance to Alaska’s economic future.

Sincerely,

LEILA KIMBRELL,
Executive Director.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL.

Anchorage, Alaska, December 7, 2023.

Re BLM Proposed Rule for the Management and Protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, 43 CFR Part 2360, RIN 1004-AE95.

Department of Interior,
Director, Bureau of Land Management,
Washington, DC.

DEAR DIRECTOR: The Resource Development Council for Alaska, Inc. (RDC) submits the following comments to the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) proposed rule for the “Management and Protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A)” originally published on September 8, 2023 (FR 62025). This proposed rule reflects a sea change to management of the NPR-A as it was originally intended. The rule is unnecessary, overly burdensome, fails to comply with current law. For the reasons that follow, at a minimum, this proposed rule should not be adopted.

Who We Are: The RDC is a statewide, not for profit, trade association comprised of individuals and companies from Alaska’s fishing, tourism, forestry, mining, and oil and gas industries. RDC’s membership includes all the land-owning Alaska Native regional corporations as well as village corporations, local communities, including the North Slope Borough, organized labor, and industry support firms. RDC’s purpose is to encourage

a strong, diversified private sector in Alaska and expand the state's economic base through the responsible development of our natural resources. The industries RDC represents are historically significant economic drivers for Alaska's economy. Combined, these industries employ or support employment for the majority of the more than 730,000 Alaskans who call Alaska home. For more than 48 years, RDC has proud history of balancing the need for a diverse economy with the need for the responsible development of our natural resources. The proposed rule threatens to reverse that.

Comment Period Should Have Been Extended: The comment period should be extended to allow for full participation of all Alaskans, in particular, the communities of the North Slope who are most impacted by this proposed rule. This proposed rule was published on September 8, 2023, with an original public comment period deadline of November 7, that has since been extended twice to the current deadline of December 7, 2023.

Notwithstanding these extensions, more time is needed to assess and analyze the substantive and technical changes proposed by this rule. The agency should not be rushing this process that has the effect of creating a presumption against oil and gas development in the NPR-A. RDC is not suggesting environmental standards and protections should be reduced for the Special Areas designated within the NPR-A. However, this is a major change to the long established management program for the NPR-A that needs sufficient time to assess impacts.

Further, it appears that the agency is trying to rush this process through for its own political purposes, which is an improper reason for fast-tracking such a major proposed rule. It has been reported that a representative of the agency stated during a public meeting that an extension of time was not possible because the agency had to consider timing under the Congressional Review Act (CRA). Using the CRA timeline to avoid a possible reversal in the next congress is a political maneuver that does not justify short circuiting the public process.

Failed Consultation: The proposed rule spends considerable time pointing to the importance of subsistence and the needs for Alaska's Native peoples and the North Slope communities who rely on subsistence hunting and fishing to justify this proposed rule. RDC does not dispute that subsistence is an important and critical practice for all Alaskans, including Alaska Native peoples and their communities. However, despite this focus, the BLM ignores the needs of our Alaska Native peoples during this rule-making process. BLM published this proposed rule during a critical subsistence period for the communities on Alaska's North Slope: the fall whaling season. RDC has been told that little to no consultation has occurred between the Alaska Native entities of the North Slope, the North Slope Borough, and other key stakeholders. What little consultation or public meeting process did occur was hastily convened with little to no opportunity for local communities to receive timely notice.

Although the proposed rule claims to comply with E.O. 13175, requiring consultation and coordination with Indian Tribal Governments, including Alaska Native Tribes and ANCSA Alaska Native Corporations, the record does not support that. Sending one letter informing these stakeholders of a rule-making effort followed by a lack of adequate consultation and doing so during an importance subsistence harvest period without granting numerous extensions of time requests from these same stakeholders fails to comply with the law and department policy.

The BLM Management should not fail in its responsibility to consult with Alaska's federally recognized Tribes and Alaska Native corporation. Meaningful consultation is required by E.O. 13175 (November 6, 2000), POTUS Memo on Tribal Consultation and Nation-to-Nation Building (January 26, 2021) and DOI 512 DM 4 (2015), and DOI 512 DM 5.

The Proposed Rule Exceeds BLM Authority: This proposal creates a new, burdensome, and time-consuming administrative process for reviewing oil and gas related development activities that are contrary to the needs and purposes of the NPR-A. The proposed rule takes the instruction of maximizing protection of Special Areas under the federal NPR-A Act (NPRAA) to an extreme that is not warranted and fails to balance the need for oil and gas development to occur for the nation's energy security and independence. BLM potentially exceeds its authority by incorporating the Integrated Activity Plan of 2022 (IAP) into the NPR-A regulations when the NPR-A is specifically exempt from the Federal Land Management Planning Act (FLPMA) planning requirement. BLM acknowledges this in the proposed rule but goes onto to say that it "nonetheless" intends to do so. In another example, BLM proposes to change the authority of officers making oil and gas related decisions from what currently must be exercised consistent with current law and after consultation with federal, state, local agencies and Native organizations to now "regardless of any existing authority." Agencies cannot simply grant themselves the power to make decisions "regardless of any existing authority;" that is simply not how our democratic process works. If anything, this proposed change is less than clear and needs additional time for review.

Presumption Against Oil & Gas Development Violates the NPRAA: The proposed rule specifically explains, under section 2361.10, that BLM will now have the authority to delay or deny, without setting a timetable, on any activities it determines will have significant adverse effects on surface resources. This is overly broad and restrictive. Further, the proposed rule states it will "presume . . . that that oil and gas leasing or infrastructure on lands allocated as available for such activities 'should NOT be permitted' . . ." (Emphasis added.) This directly contravenes the purpose and intent for which the NPR-A was established. The NPRAA directed DOI to be administered for domestic energy production through an oil and gas leasing program. BLM cannot create a presumption by rulemaking that it will not permit activity directed by Congress.

Further, the rule states it will not impact any current leasing approvals or permitted activity. This is not true. The proposed rule threatens harm to existing lease contracts given its clear conflict with NPR-A's original purposes when created in 1923 and as directed by Congress through the NPRAA.

Flawed Economic Assessment: The proposed rule summarily concludes it will not have a significant economic effect on a substantial number of small entities under the Regulatory Flexibility Act and only affects businesses in the oil and gas industry operating in the NPR-A. This is simply wrong.

The DOI's analysis in support of the proposed rule did not account for the significant economic benefits delivered to local Alaska communities (including Alaska Native organizations) from NPR-A development. Federal law mandates that 50% of lease revenue from NPR-A projects go towards a unique grant program that prioritizes improvement projects that will deliver social and environmental justice benefits to impacted communities, many of which are Alaska Native communities. The economic analysis fails to

consider the impact of local communities losing these benefits. The economic analysis also wholly fails to consider the social implications of eliminating or dramatically restricting future development in the NPR-A that would remove jobs and a substantial portion of the tax base. Responsible development on the NPR-A creates enormous economic benefits. The economic analysis the DOI used ignores benefits like the NPR-A Impact Mitigation Grant program. This grant program creates a legal requirement for local communities to receive generous revenues from projects. If project development is slowed or halted by the new rule, Alaska Native communities will lose enormous revenues for public services, health facilities and educational resources—to name a few impacted areas.

Further, the proposed rule will stifle any future development in currently approved areas of the NPR-A as companies will be wary to invest into developments in areas where the government can seemingly outlaw further development without cause. This chilling effect will have a dramatic economic impact.

Alaska's North Slope (ANS) energy production and infrastructure has had significant economic impact and contribution to Alaska's economy and our nation's energy security. In 2022, ANS produced an average of 482,000 bpd. Since the Trans Alaska Pipeline Systems (TAPS) was created, ANS has produced over 18.5 billion barrels of oil. In 2022, this support 69,250 jobs in Alaska, or 16% of employment in Alaska and accounting for \$5.9 billion in wages, or 17% of wages in Alaska. Alaska's oil and gas industry contributed \$4.5 billion in revenue to state and local governments, comprising 47% of state revenue in 2022. Over time, since statehood in 1959, the oil and gas industry has produced \$274 billion in petroleum revenues to the State. This is a significant economic impact that is threatened by this proposed rule if implemented.

Failed Unfunded Mandates Reform Act Assessment: Similarly, the proposed rule concludes without explanation that it would not have a significant or unique effect on State, local, or Tribal governments. This is also simply false. Diminished oil production from the NPR-A would result in diminished production tax and ad valorem tax revenue for the State and local governments in Alaska. This means less revenue for the State of Alaska to provide services to all Alaskans. The BLM's reasoning in this regard also likely violates its conclusion that this does not have federalism implications under E.O. 13132.

The Proposed Rule is a Direct Threat to America's Energy Security: The proposed rule concludes it will not adversely affect our national energy security in contravention of E.O. 13211. In almost the same breath, the agency states the proposed rule will "presume . . . that that oil and gas leasing or infrastructure on lands allocated as available for such activities 'should NOT be permitted' . . ." (Emphasis added.) There is no way to explain the logic of this assessment. A presumption against approving oil and gas leasing absolutely equates to less development of oil and gas energy resources.

Analysis from the U.S. Geological Survey estimates there are 8.7 billion barrels of undiscovered oil in the NPR-A, an area set aside by the Federal government specifically for petroleum development. By denying or dramatically restricting development in the region, the Administration is denying Alaskans—and all Americans—reliable, affordable energy, as well as billions of dollars in revenues. We cannot afford to further limit U.S. production which will only increase our reliance on foreign nations, including adversarial nations, amid rising geopolitical

threats. At a time when oil prices are rising and global supply can be easily constricted by foreign governments, investing in domestic oil production is a matter of national and energy security. During a time of high inflation across the country, this misguided rule will almost certainly lead to higher energy prices for working class families across America. Restricting access to energy development limits consumers' access to affordable, reliable energy.

Furthermore, oil production on the North Slope and in the NPR-A contributes to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS), a vital piece of U.S. infrastructure. Oil produced in the NPR-A will keep TAPS economically viable and capable of providing oil to the rest of the United States and beyond. Restricting future development of the NPR-A by creating a presumption against permitting the uses for which the NPR-A was specifically developed directly threatens our energy security.

Conclusion: As indicated above, this process is being fast-tracked, lacks transparency, possibly exceeds the agency's legal authority, and lacks proper consultation as required by department policy. At the very least, the complexity of the new proposal warrants additional time for public review and scrutiny and, importantly, meaningful consultation with the Alaska Native tribal entities, corporations, and communities most impacted by these decisions.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

LEILA KIMBRELL,
Executive Director.

TRIBUTE TO LAURENCE “LARRY” BENZ

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to an accomplished and compassionate Kentucky business leader Dr. Laurence “Larry” Benz, the founder of Confluent Health. I have had the opportunity to work alongside Larry, and we have developed a strong friendship. Through military service, professional sports, and now a thriving business career, he has accumulated a wide range of experiences to help grow Kentucky’s economy. He will soon be inducted into the Kentucky Entrepreneur Hall of Fame for his transformational leadership abilities and impact on Kentuckians’ lives.

Prior to his start in the entrepreneurial space, Dr. Benz served in the U.S. Army as a captain in the Army Medical Specialist Corps. For his devoted service in the military, he received the Meritorious Service Medal. I am thankful for his bravery and unwavering commitment to our country. While still serving, Dr. Benz founded the Kentucky Orthopedic Rehab Team, a private practice outpatient physical therapy company. Through this work, he effectively pursued his passion for providing Kentuckians with excellent physical therapy access and care. The company went on to become the largest private practice in Kentucky and southern Indiana, eventually expanding into North Carolina and Florida.

After selling that business, Dr. Benz went on to cofound with his wife Dr. Patricia Benz, a well-respected physical therapist Confluent Health. The

company helps support businesses that offer rehabilitation services like physical therapy, occupational therapy, chronic pain management, and sports medicine. Confluent Health assists in all the “behind-the-scenes” work that goes into keeping these rehabilitation spaces open. Additionally, they help practitioners get access to specialty board certifications and post-professional programs so that they can focus on providing care instead of worrying about the business side of their practices. In 2022, I was glad to join Dr. Benz for the opening of Confluent Health’s new headquarters in Louisville, marking a historic investment in our city while delivering first-rate care to Kentuckians. Dr. Benz then took everything he learned in his time as CEO of Confluent Health and stepped into a new role helping grow the Dental Care Alliance. They serve approximately 400 dental private practices across 24 States.

Dr. Benz’s excellence in business is paired with a drive to help others and give back to communities. Outside of his professional work, he has shown a commitment to education in Kentucky. In 2011, Dr. Benz was appointed to serve on the board of trustees my alma mater, the University of Louisville, and went on to be elected board chairman last year. Currently, he serves as a member of the UofL Athletic Association and the president’s council. He is a proven leader whose expertise is invaluable in both the healthcare and academic spaces. He has been invited to present at over 250 physical therapy programs, national conferences, and MBA programs throughout the country. His vision for future generations of physical therapy providers is founded in the values of empathy and compassion. There is no doubt that Larry has made his mark on the industry and continues to leave a lasting impact each and every day.

Larry’s career is one focused on kindness and support. He has emphasized patients’ well-being and mental health, along with their physical health. On the provider’s side, he has lifted small private practices well beyond what they would have been able to do on their own, in a variety of fields of medicine. He has reached nearly every region of Kentucky over the course of his career, and I admire his and Patty’s continued commitment to the Louisville area. I also admire their commitment to their family, with children Aaron, Lauren, Jonathan, and their grandchildren Levi, Johnny, Elliot, and Valora.

Again, I ask my colleagues to please join me in congratulating Dr. Larry Benz on his induction into the Kentucky Entrepreneur Hall of Fame and recognizing his profound impact on Kentucky.

TRIBUTE TO CHARLES SIMPSON

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to my good

longtime friend, U.S. District Court Judge for the Western District of Kentucky Charles R. Simpson III, in special celebration of the upcoming ceremony at the Gene Snyder U.S. Courthouse for the unveiling of his official portrait.

Chuck and I have been friends for a while. In fact, our friendship goes all the way back to our internship with Henry Clay.

Jokes aside, I am proud to have known Chuck for so long. We both attended the University of Louisville, but we didn’t get to know each other until I came back to Kentucky to begin my law career. We practiced law together for a brief period. I was terrible and hated it. I wouldn’t go to myself for a simple will. Chuck was great and loved it. And thankfully for me, Chuck also loved politics, so I got his help in running for Jefferson County judge-executive. We worked hard together on that first campaign. And amazingly, we won by 11,000 votes—a sizeable victory for a Republican in a blue city—and I was lucky to keep Chuck on my team as legal counsel.

Chuck was also there when I first ran for Senate. I headed back to DC, and Chuck stayed in Louisville to build on his law career, but we remained in touch. Only a couple years into my first term, I had the opportunity to recommend a candidate for appointment to the Federal bench. Knowing Chuck’s character and legal chops, I didn’t have to look any further. President Reagan made the wise choice of nominating Chuck in 1986 to the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Kentucky. He served as chief judge for several years, beginning in 1994. Under his supervision as chief judge, the court underwent impressive transformations to improve its handling of administrative matters.

I don’t mean to brag in observing that Chuck’s appointment turned out to be a great move. He has been an excellent judge who is respected throughout the legal community. He understands complex legal issues very quickly and always hears out both sides in court before making decisions. Judge Simpson’s fairness and hard work earned him renown throughout Kentucky. He won the Louisville Bar’s Judge of the Year in 2000 and the Kentucky Bar’s Outstanding Judge of the Year in 2005.

Chuck’s work is inspired not only by his hometown of Louisville, but also by his academic and professional journeys abroad. He brings with him a special set of skills, knowing how to connect with others internationally. He created a special sister court relationship between his court and one in Croatia, and Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court William Rehnquist even appointed him to an international judicial council.

Of course, I would be remiss not to mention the time Judge Simpson made international news on a visit to Russia when he accidentally locked himself in

the courtroom cage usually reserved for the defendant. Apparently, it was quite difficult to find the key—in Russia, go figure. Everyone handled the situation with great humor, and luckily, his travels to other countries such as Cyprus, Slovenia, and many other places, did not include a similar experience—as far as I know.

Devoted to the court and always finding enthusiasm for his work, Judge Simpson kept a sizeable caseload even after achieving senior status in 2013. He has a great sense of humor and his firm dedication to the law and commitment to improving the lives of others drives him every day.

Judge Simpson's involvement in the community extends well outside of work too. He is a loyal member of local, State, and Federal bar associations, and his peers have entrusted him with leadership roles over the years because they know he represents them well and gets the job done. He holds status as an outstanding alumnus of UofL law school and received the Lawrence Grauman Award—the law school's most prestigious award—in 2006, honoring a lifetime record of leadership and service to the legal profession and community. Chuck's success is hard to encapsulate in just a few short pages. You never find him touting his own accolades since he is quick to credit others for his accomplishments, both on the bench and in his personal life.

What he values and celebrates most is his family. Chuck is a devoted husband to his wife Clare, a proud father of their three children Charlie, Pam, and Lauren, and a loving grandfather to all his grandchildren. I have the pleasure of tailgating with Chuck and Clare several times a year to root on the Louisville Cardinals through thick and thin. It was also a joy to have their daughter Pam serve in my Washington office for several years. She was an integral member of the team.

I know the entire Simpson family is beaming with pride today in celebration of this incredible man who devoted his career to serving the public and making a difference.

I ask my colleagues to please join me in congratulating U.S. District Court Judge Charles Simpson on the special occasion, and recognizing his profound impact on Kentucky, the judiciary, and our country.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING QUINN LLOYD

• Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, today we recognize Quinn Lloyd of Columbus, KS, and honor the life and legacy of a young man whose kindness, character, and generosity have had a profound effect on his community and our Nation.

Known for his warm personality and infectious smile, Quinn was a beloved son, brother, friend, and teammate. A

force on the gridiron and joy to all who knew him, Quinn brightened the lives of everyone around him.

Even in the face of unimaginable tragedy, Quinn's generosity has continued through the gift of life he provided to others in need through organ donation. This incredible act of selflessness and courage exemplifies the strength of his spirit and the depth of his character.

On November 4, 2025, his family, friends, and the Columbus, KS, community joined together for Quinn's Honor Walk, a moving ceremony that celebrated both his life and the hope he has given others. His gift will help others live, and his light will continue to shine through the lives he touched.

Quinn will be laid to rest alongside his sister Ruby, surrounded by a community that loved him deeply. Though his time with us was far too short, his legacy of kindness and generosity will endure for generations and continue to inspire.

I now ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Quinn Lloyd and in offering our prayers and deepest sympathies to his family, friends, and the entire Columbus, KS, community. •

TRIBUTE TO RICH HANSON

• Mr. YOUNG. Madam President, I rise today to honor the distinguished service of Richard "Rich" Hanson, a Hoosier who has dedicated his life to aviation and public service.

After an extraordinary career in aviation and law enforcement, Rich is retiring as president of the Academy of Model Aeronautics, AMA, after 9 years of distinguished leadership. Headquartered in Muncie, IN, AMA is the Nation's premier organization dedicated to model aviation, a community that inspires innovation, education, and a lifelong passion for flight.

Rich's love of aviation began early in the Civil Air Patrol from 8th through 12th grades. After high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, trained as a helicopter pilot, and served with distinction in Vietnam. He later continued his service in the Army National Guard, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

In 1973, Rich joined the Arizona Department of Public Safety as a helicopter pilot, embarking on another chapter of service. He advanced through the ranks, ultimately commanding aviation operations and leading the department's Criminal Justice Support Bureau. Even during his days off, Rich continued to share his love of flying by piloting tours over the Grand Canyon.

Alongside his public service career, Rich devoted decades to advancing the hobby and science of model aviation through AMA. Rich's efforts have strengthened aviation safety, expanded STEM education opportunities, and inspired countless young people to pursue careers in aviation and aerospace.

Rich's leadership has guided AMA through some of the most significant

transitions in its history, particularly the emergence of drone technology and the evolving regulatory landscape surrounding unmanned aircraft systems. Through his steady advocacy, he helped others appreciate the strong safety record and educational value of model aviation, a legacy that will endure for generations.

On behalf of Hoosiers, I extend my thanks and congratulations to Rich Hanson on an impactful career of service and dedication to the field of aviation and his country. •

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 2:24 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Alli, one of its reading clerks, announced that pursuant to section 451 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (Public Law 113-128), the Minority Leader appoints the following individual to the National Council on Disability: Ms. Sascha Bittner of San Francisco, California.

MEASURES READ THE FIRST TIME

The following bill was read the first time:

S. 3166. A bill to rescind unused COVID funding and reduce the deficit.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. PAUL, from the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, without amendment:

S. 861. A bill to streamline the sharing of information among Federal disaster assistance agencies, to expedite the delivery of life-saving assistance to disaster survivors, to speed the recovery of communities from disasters, to protect the security and privacy of information provided by disaster survivors, and for other purposes.

By Mr. PAUL, from the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, with amendments:

S. 872. A bill to amend the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 to ensure that other transaction agreements are reported to USAspending.gov, and for other purposes.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. SCOTT of Florida:

S. 3153. A bill to require inclusion on the list of Chinese military companies operating in the United States of Chinese entities on certain other lists maintained by the United States Government; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Mr. KAINE:

S. 3154. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to increase the number of individuals from the District of Columbia who may be appointed to military service academies; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Ms. KLOBUCHAR (for herself and Mr. CURTIS):

S. 3155. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to require the Administrator of the Small Business Administration to publish or update a resource guide for small business concerns operating as child care providers, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

By Ms. ALSO BROOKS (for herself, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. KAIN, and Mr. WARNER):

S. 3156. A bill to provide certain Federal employees with the ability to request and receive a period of forbearance on certain mortgage loans during a period during which there is a lapse in appropriations, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. LUJÁN (for himself and Mr. MARSHALL):

S. 3157. A bill to amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to improve direct certification, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

By Mr. SCOTT of Florida:

S. 3158. A bill to amend section 1260H of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 to clarify that the identification of Chinese military companies is not covered by the Administrative Procedure Act; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. LANKFORD (for himself and Mr. MULLIN):

S. 3159. A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to temporarily provide for long-term care pharmacy supply fees in connection with the dispensing of certain drugs; to the Committee on Finance.

By Ms. SLOTKIN:

S. 3160. A bill to provide for interagency tabletop exercises to assess the impacts of Department of Defense decisions during crises and evaluate United States Government tools available to augment Department of Defense capabilities in competition, crisis, and conflict, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Ms. SLOTKIN (for herself and Ms. ERNST):

S. 3161. A bill to enhance protection of data affecting operational security of Department of Defense personnel, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Ms. SLOTKIN:

S. 3162. A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to carry out a pilot program under which the Secretary shall develop and implement a comprehensive wastewater surveillance system at certain installations of the Department of Defense, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Ms. SLOTKIN (for herself and Mr. SHEEHY):

S. 3163. A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to seek to engage appropriate officials of Taiwan in a joint program with Taiwan to enable the fielding of uncrewed systems and counter-uncrewed systems capabilities; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Ms. SLOTKIN:

S. 3164. A bill to require a briefing on increasing procurement of strategic and critical materials from sources in the United States; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Mr. VAN HOLLEN (for himself and Ms. ALSO BROOKS):

S. 3165. A bill to appropriate funds for pay and allowances of Federal employees during the lapse in appropriations that began on October 1, 2025, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Ms. ERNST (for herself and Mrs. BLACKBURN):

S. 3166. A bill to rescind unused COVID funding and reduce the deficit; read the first time.

By Ms. SLOTKIN (for herself, Mr. KELLY, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, and Mr. WYDEN):

S. 3167. A bill to provide for appropriate limitations on military deployments, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

The following concurrent resolutions and Senate resolutions were read, and referred (or acted upon), as indicated:

By Mr. GALLEGUO:

S. Res. 491. A resolution recognizing the 80th anniversary of the commencement of continuous operations of Stars and Stripes in the Pacific and the invaluable service of the Stars and Stripes as the "hometown newspaper" for members of the Armed Forces, civilian employees, and family members stationed around the world; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 478

At the request of Mr. KENNEDY, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. McCORMICK) was added as a cosponsor of S. 478, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from transmitting certain information to the Department of Justice for use by the national instant criminal background check system.

S. 567

At the request of Mr. WHITEHOUSE, the name of the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. SCHATZ) was added as a cosponsor of S. 567, a bill to award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the First Rhode Island Regiment, in recognition of their dedicated service during the Revolutionary War.

S. 817

At the request of Mr. CRUZ, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. McCORMICK) was added as a cosponsor of S. 817, a bill to provide for the imposition of sanctions with respect to forced organ harvesting within the People's Republic of China, and for other purposes.

S. 864

At the request of Mr. MARSHALL, the name of the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA) was added as a cosponsor of S. 864, a bill to amend title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act to apply financial assistance towards the cost-sharing requirements of health insurance plans, and for other purposes.

S. 986

At the request of Mr. KAIN, the name of the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. KIM) was added as a cosponsor of S. 986, a bill to address and take action to prevent bullying and harassment of students.

S. 1120

At the request of Mr. REED, the name of the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. KIM) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1120, a bill to establish an Interagency Council on Service to promote and

strengthen opportunities for military service, national service, and public service for all people of the United States, and for other purposes.

S. 1649

At the request of Mr. TUBERVILLE, the name of the Senator from Wyoming (Ms. LUMMIS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1649, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to treat certain marketplace providers as importers for purposes of the excise tax on sporting goods.

S. 1784

At the request of Mr. PETERS, the name of the Senator from Michigan (Ms. SLOTKIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1784, a bill to improve coordination of Federal efforts to identify and mitigate health and national security risks through maintaining a list of essential medicines, conducting a risk assessment of essential medicine supply chains, and creating a monitoring system to map essential medicine supply chains using data analytics.

S. 1984

At the request of Ms. BALDWIN, the name of the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1984, a bill to prohibit an employer from terminating the coverage of an employee under a group health plan while the employer is engaged in a lock-out or while the employee is engaged in a lawful strike, and for other purposes.

S. 2259

At the request of Ms. SLOTKIN, the name of the Senator from Indiana (Mr. BANKS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2259, a bill to prohibit the operation on property of the Department of Defense of certain vehicles designed, developed, manufactured, or supplied by persons owned by, controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction of a foreign entity of concern, and for other purposes.

S. 2355

At the request of Mr. MARSHALL, the name of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. MORENO) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2355, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide for hospital and insurer price transparency.

S. 2541

At the request of Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the name of the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. KIM) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2541, a bill to establish requirements for quality and discard date phrases that are voluntarily declared on the food label to display calendar dates.

S. 2553

At the request of Mr. HAGERTY, the name of the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2553, a bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to classify aliens who have been convicted of, or who have committed, an offense for driving while intoxicated or impaired as inadmissible and deportable.

S. 2687

At the request of Mr. CRUZ, the name of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. MORENO)

was added as a cosponsor of S. 2687, a bill to repeal the Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Amendment Act of 2022 enacted by the District of Columbia Council.

S. 3071

At the request of Mr. LUJÁN, the name of the Senator from Missouri (Mr. HAWLEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3071, a bill to appropriate funds to ensure uninterrupted benefits under the supplemental nutrition assistance program and the special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children.

S. 3074

At the request of Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER, the name of the Senator from Delaware (Mr. COONS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3074, a bill to direct the Secretary of Agriculture to reimburse State agencies for costs incurred in carrying out the supplemental nutrition assistance program during a lapse in appropriations.

S. 3141

At the request of Mr. WARNER, the name of the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3141, a bill to prohibit Executive agencies from carrying out a reduction in force, or any similar effort, during any period during which there is a lapse in appropriations, and for other purposes.

S. 3143

At the request of Ms. DUCKWORTH, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3143, a bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to allow certain alien veterans to be paroled into the United States to receive health care furnished by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

S. 3144

At the request of Ms. DUCKWORTH, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3144, a bill to require the Secretary of Homeland Security to establish a veterans visa program to permit veterans who have been removed from the United States to return as immigrants, and for other purposes.

S. 3147

At the request of Ms. BALDWIN, the names of the Senator from Oregon (Mr. MERKLEY), the Senator from Michigan (Mr. PETERS), the Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN) and the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI) were added as cosponsors of S. 3147, a bill to provide for continuing appropriations for Head Start programs.

S.J. RES. 82

At the request of Mr. KING, the name of the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET) was added as a cosponsor of S.J. Res. 82, a joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Office of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services relating to “Pol-

icy on Adhering to the Text of the Administrative Procedure Act”.

S. RES. 490

At the request of Mr. COONS, the names of the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) were added as cosponsors of S. Res. 490, a resolution affirming the critical importance of preserving the United States’ advantage in artificial intelligence and ensuring that the United States achieves and maintains artificial intelligence dominance.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 491—RECOGNIZING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMENCEMENT OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS OF STARS AND STRIPES IN THE PACIFIC AND THE INVALUABLE SERVICE OF THE STARS AND STRIPES AS THE “HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER” FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES, CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES, AND FAMILY MEMBERS STATIONED AROUND THE WORLD

Mr. GALLEGRO submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 491

Whereas May 14, 2025, marked the 80th anniversary of the commencement of continuous operations, in service to the military community of the United States, of *Stars and Stripes* in the Pacific, a military newspaper established in Honolulu to provide an independent, uncensored news source for members of the Armed Forces fighting in World War II;

Whereas *Stars and Stripes* was heralded for indispensable service when it was initially established during the Civil War and again during World War I, when General John J. Pershing reestablished *Stars and Stripes* to provide news and information as an important morale-building force for soldiers serving in the American Expeditionary Forces;

Whereas after its permanent formation during World War II, *Stars and Stripes* commenced printing in Tokyo on October 3, 1945, working in requisitioned space formally occupied by the *Japan Times*, and excelled in its mission across every theater of war, leading President Harry S. Truman to state, “In Africa, Europe, and the Pacific, *Stars and Stripes* has established itself as a cherished and important soldier’s institution”;

Whereas *Stars and Stripes* has continuously covered news “about the military, for the military” in conflicts since World War II, including conflicts taking place in Korea, Vietnam, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan;

Whereas while readership of newspapers has declined in recent years as technology has evolved, *Stars and Stripes* has innovated in finding new ways and products to deliver the “hometown news” to the broadest portion of military community; and

Whereas through internet versions of the newspaper, social media, and other media products, *Stars and Stripes* is now reaching 1,400,000 readers every day: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the commencement of continuous operations of *Stars and Stripes* in the Pacific—

(1) commemorates this important milestone in the history of an important institution of the United States; and

(2) congratulates and honors the men and women of *Stars and Stripes*, past and present, who have so diligently served the United States military community.

AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 3934. Mr. CRUZ proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 463, expressing condemnation of the Chinese Communist Party’s persecution of religious minority groups, including Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists and the detention of Pastor “Ezra” Jin Mingri and leaders of the Zion Church, and reaffirming the United States’ global commitment to promote religious freedom and tolerance.

SA 3935. Mr. CRUZ proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 463, *supra*.

TEXT OF AMENDMENTS

SA 3934. Mr. CRUZ proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 463, expressing condemnation of the Chinese Communist Party’s persecution of religious minority groups, including Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists and the detention of Pastor “Ezra” Jin Mingri and leaders of the Zion Church, and reaffirming the United States’ global commitment to promote religious freedom and tolerance; as follows:

Strike all after the resolving clause and insert the following:

That the Senate—

(1) strongly condemns the Chinese Communist Party’s persecution of religious minority groups, including Pastor “Ezra” Jin Mingri and other leaders and members of Zion Church and other faith communities;

(2) reaffirms the commitment of the United States to promote religious freedom and tolerance around the world and to help provide protection and relief to religious minorities facing persecution and violence;

(3) calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all detained members of Zion Church, including Pastor Jin, and all other wrongfully detained religious practitioners in China;

(4) calls for the Government of the People’s Republic of China to cease its harassment and intimidation of the relatives of Zion Church members and their relatives, including tactics of transnational repression overseas;

(5) calls on the Government of the People’s Republic of China to release all other arbitrarily detained religious believers, including Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and other Christians; and

(6) demands that the Government of the People’s Republic of China—

(A) respect the internationally recognized human right to freedom of religion or belief; and

(B) end all forms of violence and discrimination against religious minority groups and entities.

SA 3935. Mr. CRUZ proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 463, expressing condemnation of the Chinese Communist Party’s persecution of religious minority groups, including Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists and the detention of Pastor “Ezra” Jin Mingri and leaders of the

Zion Church, and reaffirming the United States' global commitment to promote religious freedom and tolerance; as follows:

Strike the preamble and insert the following:

Whereas, on October 10, 2025, international news outlets reported that the Chinese Communist Party (referred to in this preamble as the "CCP") detained Pastor "Ezra" Jin Mingri, who is the founder of Zion Church, from his home in Guangxi Province, China;

Whereas CCP authorities also arrested nearly 30 other pastors and church members from Zion Church;

Whereas 23 members of Zion Church remain in detention centers, while other members have been released on bail, and still others are being harassed and intimidated by Chinese authorities;

Whereas the CCP's actions mark the largest coordinated, nationwide crackdown against an unregistered Christian house church network in more than 40 years;

Whereas thousands of Zion Church members and millions of Christians and other religious adherents who reside in the People's Republic of China seek to peacefully worship God and care for their neighbors without the threat or fear of persecution;

Whereas the imprisonment of Pastor Jin is the latest instance of CCP persecution of a large number of religious minorities, including Christians, Muslim Uyghurs, Hui Muslims, and Tibetan Buddhists;

Whereas, since coming to power in 2012, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has escalated a campaign to "sinicize" religion in China by—

(1) allowing authorities to burn bibles, imprison believers, and tear down Christian crosses; and

(2) forcing religious organizations and adherents to conform to the ideology of the CCP;

Whereas, under the policy of sinicizing religion, the Government of China has—

(1) ordered the removal of crosses from Catholic and Protestant churches;

(2) censored religious texts;

(3) imposed CCP-approved religious materials;

(4) replaced images of Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary with pictures of Xi Jinping; and

(5) instructed clergy to preach CCP ideology;

Whereas, in 2021, the Trump administration determined the CCP—

(1) had committed crimes against humanity and genocide against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups, including ethnic Kazakhs and ethnic Kyrgyz; and

(2) has continued to subject religious minority groups in China to restrictions on religious practices and freedom of expression, arbitrary imprisonment, forced sterilization, torture, and forced labor;

Whereas the CCP has made consistent efforts to erode the religious, linguistic, and cultural identity of Tibetans, including by—

(1) closing Buddhist monasteries and limiting entry or practitioners;

(2) forcibly disappearing and arbitrarily detaining Tibetans for practicing their religious beliefs;

(3) censoring religious content online; and

(4) expanding the use of boarding schools to indoctrinate children in CCP-approved curricula and Mandarin Chinese;

Whereas Congress unanimously passed the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-292), which established, as the official policy of the United States—

(1) to condemn violations of religious freedom;

(2) to promote, and assist other governments in the promotion of, the fundamental right to freedom of religion;

(3) to stand for liberty and with the persecuted;

(4) to use and implement appropriate tools in the United States foreign policy apparatus, including diplomatic, political, commercial, charitable, educational, and cultural channels; and

(5) to promote respect for religious freedom by all governments and peoples;

Whereas, under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has designated the People's Republic of China as a "country of particular concern for religious freedom" every year since 1999;

Whereas Congress unanimously passed the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (Public Law 114-281) in 2016 to enhance the capabilities of the United States to advance religious liberty globally through diplomacy, training, counterterrorism, and foreign assistance;

Whereas the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (subtitle F of title XII of Public Law 114-328), enacted by Congress in 2016, gives the President the authority to impose targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for committing human rights violations;

Whereas the People's Republic of China is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in Paris on December 10, 1948, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in New York on December 19, 1966, which recognize freedom of religion as an internationally-recognized human right;

Whereas Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China explicitly states that citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief; and

Whereas the United States must show strong international leadership when it comes to the advancement of religious freedoms, liberties, and protections: Now, therefore, be it

MEASURE READ THE FIRST TIME—S. 3166

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I understand there is a bill at the desk, and I ask for its first reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title for the first time.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 3166) to rescind unused COVID funding and reduce the deficit.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, now I ask for a second reading, and in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to my own request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The bill will be read for the second time on the next legislative day.

ORDERS FOR SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2025

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it stand adjourned until 12 noon on Saturday, November 8; that following the prayer and pledge, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the morning hour be deemed expired, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and the Sen-

ate 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.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask that it stand adjourned under the previous order following the remarks of Senator CASSIDY.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, I am going to try and envision a way forward for Democrats, Republicans, and Americans out of our current situation, with a different proposal than people have already thought of.

Now, the government has been shut down for 38 days, and tomorrow we are going to vote again, and tomorrow the vote will again fail. But Americans and Congress are frustrated.

We need to open the government. So if to open the government we need to talk about healthcare, let's talk about healthcare. Let's have a conversation in the family.

We have an affordability crisis, and health insurance is part of it. Now, this is personal to me. I am a doctor. I practiced in a hospital for the uninsured and the poorly insured for 20 years, and many of those people that came to see me were middle-income Americans who could not afford their medical bills and could not afford insurance. I want to see this solved.

But if we are going to solve it now, in this present circumstance, we need to move beyond entrenched ways of thinking that have settled us in our camps and refused to allow us to listen to the other person.

And I thank some of my Democratic colleagues for being here. We have got to be creative.

Now, the Affordable Care Act, ObamaCare—whatever you want to call it—tried to make healthcare affordable by giving insurance companies more money. The enhanced premium tax credit, EPTC, is the latest example. Next year, it would send \$26 billion to insurers hoping families would see smaller bills.

But that doesn't actually make healthcare less expensive, and for some, it actually makes the health insurance more expensive if you are not getting subsidized care on the exchange.

So we can do better than just papering over the costs for subsidies. Instead of paying insurance companies to manage your money, let's trust Americans with a prefunded flexible savings account worth as much as the enhanced premium tax credit that they would receive.

Let me repeat that: a prefunded—not out of their salary but prefunded for the Federal taxpayer—equivalent in value to the enhanced premium tax credit that they would receive.

Now, let me make it clear. I am not speaking for the Republican caucus. I am not speaking for President Trump. I am not even speaking as the HELP Committee chairman. I am speaking as a Senator and as an American that sees us at an impasse and is trying to think differently about how we can move forward.

So I am going to present to my fellow Americans an idea that, hopefully, will move us out of this stalemate and go forward. And I want to try and speak as if I am speaking to the Americans back home.

Here is the problem. Under the enhanced premium tax credit, if your insurance premium goes up, if the insurance company decides to pay more, they just get more subsidy from the taxpayer.

Now, insurance companies get paid no matter what, and it doesn't matter how expensive the tab is. There is absolutely no incentive to bring the cost down. There is no transparency as to what the care really costs, and there is absolutely no reward for the family that goes to a place which is less expensive.

It is like putting a bandaid on a broken bone. You are hiding the fracture, but you are not fixing the broken bone. Let's fix the broken bone, which is high healthcare costs.

So put simply, the enhanced premium tax credit does not empower patients. It enriches insurance companies. By the way, they are important. We need them. But if I have a choice of empowering you, the American, or enriching an insurance company, I and we should pick our fellow American.

Now, imagine a different type of help, not paying the insurance company another subsidy but putting money, prefunded, not out of your salary, but roughly equal to the enhanced premium tax credit—put that into an account that you control. Every eligible American citizen on the exchange would receive this federally prefunded flexible spending account, and it would work like the prepaid health account you use for real world health expenses.

It would actually have more flexibility than your current insurance proposal. You go to the dentist; it can pay for dental care. You go to the orthodontist; it can pay for your orthodontic care. It can pay for eyeglasses, which typically insurance does not pay for. Prescriptions, drugs, medical supplies, your deductible, your copays—it can pay for it all.

Now, it wouldn't pay for insurance premiums. This is about you spending directly for your healthcare costs, not about enriching insurance companies.

It would pay for the care that families actually use. That is what a prefunded flexible spending account actually does.

I keep emphasizing “pre” because I mentioned this to people, and they say: Wait a second. This has to come out of my salary.

No, this would be the money that would go to an enhanced premium tax credit, and instead, it goes into this account that you control.

Now, it seems complicated for some. I go and I mention it to them, and they say: Oh, boy, this is something different, BILL. This is a great idea, but it is kind of like, it is just too different.

Seventy-two percent of Americans getting their healthcare through some government entity are offered flexible savings accounts. Forty-seven percent of people getting insurance through their employer are offered FSAs. This is something that is used by millions of Americans already.

So what I am proposing is just to give this option to people on the exchanges. And, by the way, the Federal Government already offers flexible savings accounts to people on the small business exchanges.

Members of Congress, we are on the ObamaCare small business exchange. We have the option of choosing an FSA. My family has one. And the Department of Treasury already has an office through which they funnel money to pay for these flexible spending accounts that I, as an individual, choose to get.

So what we are speaking of is just offering to people on the exchanges—on the individual exchange—that which is already offered to people on the small business exchange and paying for it by the same mechanism in which it is already done through that exchange.

Now, still, there is going to be some bureaucracy involved, but if there is any President that can overcome the inertia of the bureaucracy to make it happen by January 1, 2026, it is Donald J. Trump. Donald Trump is the man who, when it was told to him it would take 18 years, 10 years, 18 months to come up with a vaccine and a program to prevent COVID transmission, he did it in 10 to 11 months. This President can overcome the inertia, and we have a running start because the Federal Government is already doing this.

Now, let me make clear the key differences between enhanced premium tax credits and federally funded flexible spending accounts.

First, who gets the money? Under the enhanced premium tax credit, insurance companies; under this, it is patients and families.

What can it be used for? Here, the premium tax credit goes for insurance premiums—period, stop, full stop. The money goes to the insurance company. Here, real care, your doctor visit, your deductible, your copay, your dentist, your glasses, your prescriptions, that sort of thing.

Who makes the decision? The insurance company. Just wait and fight with them about a preauthorization. Under the flexible spending account, you make the decision. You have the power.

And, lastly, does it lower costs? No. It is pretty clear. If we continue to fund insurance companies no matter what they pay, it drives up the costs. In contrast, if you empower the patient, that patient is going to find the most affordable option. It has been studied.

If you give people something that they perceive as their own money, they hunt for that bargain. By the way, if they go and they find out that the cash price is cheaper than what the insurance company would charge them, they will have the option of using this for the cash price.

So we have reforms in here that give the patient even more power. The good thing about that, as the patient saves money, so does the taxpayer, and that is a good thing.

So the prefunded—prefunded, prefunded—flexible spending account doesn't treat people like dependents of the government, as do the enhanced premium tax credits. It treats you like a capable consumer who knows what is best for your family.

You decide where to go for dental work. You decide your pharmacy. You decide whether to pay the cash price or the negotiated price that the insurance company offers you, and instead of Washington paying insurance companies to manage your day-to-day care, you manage it with fairness, transparency, and flexibility.

Now, some will ask: Won't this cost money? Of course. In the first year, it will be about the same amount as the enhanced premium tax credit, and my Democratic colleagues should like that. But the individual would be getting better value through the federally prefunded FSA because she is spending it on that which she actually needs, as opposed to up to 20 percent of it going for overhead profit and administrative costs.

It isn't just fiscally responsible. It is common sense. Who wouldn't rather have their money in their own pocket than for the insurance company to dictate how they spend it?

So here is the choice before us: In conclusion, we can keep paying insurance companies to pay for over the higher costs, behind confusing bills, in a system which actually raises the cost for some, or we can give Americans the tools—we can trust our fellow Americans to pay for their care directly, at fair prices, with transparency.

If you will, it puts patients first, not insurers. It encourages competition. It rewards smart choices, and it begins to make healthcare truly affordable, not by inflating subsidies but by unleashing the power of the consumer.

Let's stop writing blank checks to insurance companies. Let's invest in our fellow Americans.

I say this: We have to first open the government. This takes writing some legislation. We have to open the government.

But we have to be willing to take a risk to solve a problem and not be

afraid to do something different. I have seen in our Chamber right now a hunkering down. We have not been able to solve it. So we are not going to try anything different. We are just going to wear the other side down until they wave the white flag.

Now is the time to be creative. I am a rock-ribbed Republican, but I will just say what I just offered is not a Republican solution; it is not a Democratic solution. It is an American solution.

Let's open the government. Let's work together. Let's fix healthcare and give the American more power than the insurance company.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Do I have consent to ask my colleague a question?

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

Ms. CANTWELL. Will my colleague yield for a question?

Mr. CASSIDY. Absolutely.

Ms. CANTWELL. Thank you.

I noticed in your proposal that you are talking about something that you had hoped to effect January of next year. Is that correct?

Mr. CASSIDY. That is the goal, to have this ready for next year.

Ms. CANTWELL. What is the Senator from Louisiana's interpretation of how the market controls the—you are trying to create a market mechanism where you are giving the consumer the same amount of money you would give them in the tax credits to make the insurance more affordable, only through a health savings account. But how do you know, once you have that in a health savings account, the market is going to not still have an increase above that amount? So how do you think this affects the market?

Mr. CASSIDY. One other question first, this is a flexible savings account, not a health savings account. There is a legal distinction, and I want to make that.

When the enhanced premium tax credits are not renewed—we know the insurance companies have already set up their rates—and so the consumer, our fellow American, will be choosing from the offerings that have been made by the insurance company for them to choose from.

The difference would be—and they will see, by the way, that the policy for someone at 400 percent of Federal poverty levels costs about \$2,500 more a year than it otherwise would have with the enhanced premium tax credit.

This would be supplemental. We would say to that individual: You are at 400 percent of Federal poverty level. Your policy is \$2,500 more a year. You will get a flexible spending account prefunded to offset the cost of this.

Now, if it is my family, I would say: Hmm, I have got \$2,500. Maybe, instead of going for a silver plan, I will go for a bronze plan, because now I can offset the higher deductible with my flexible savings account. And because I am

going for a bronze plan, my premium will be lower.

But that is trust in the American people. We are plugging into the current insurance market. We are actually not changing at all how it functions.

Ms. CANTWELL. Well, if the Senator would yield for another question. I am assuming that you think affordability is the key. I certainly think affordability is the key. Nobody wants to subsidize expensive health insurance. We want to create market mechanisms to drive down the costs of health insurance, not just spend money to buy expensive insurance, whether you buy it through the tax credit or buy it through a health savings account. We want to create those mechanisms.

So, again, all of this is going to take place in November and December—right now, in December. So somehow you would make some calculation in January about what would go into a savings account or are you thinking of a flat number?

Mr. CASSIDY. That is a wonderful question. No.

The Federal Government knows—or put it this way. Many States have calculated what the insurance rate would be with an enhanced premium tax credit and what will the insurance rate be without the enhanced premium tax credit. It has been calculated for our fellow Americans what the value of enhanced premium tax credits would be if they signed up for a certain policy in their State, given their age and their health condition. They know that. The question is whether they get the credit or not.

Well, they are not going to get it, so their policy is going to be higher. And this, under the plan—if we could agree to it—they would then get the FSA in an amount equivalent to that which they did not receive as a payment to the insurance company. Instead, it would be a payment to the flexible savings account they would have and that they would then use it for these services.

Ms. CANTWELL. If the Senator would continue to yield.

The issue is that, you know, so much of this is already set up, and I think you are trying to be creative in a way to—instead of the Alexander-Murray cost revenue sharing, I think you are trying to figure out something that would get people the same amount of money to make them whole over the next year or two; is that correct?

Mr. CASSIDY. That is correct.

Ms. CANTWELL. So I would say what we are trying to do is make people, as the market is out there, whole over the next year or two. That is exactly what we are trying to do.

We are happy to debate how we make health insurance more affordable after that. That has been a goal of our side of the aisle for decades. We want to make it more affordable. Now, we will always be measured about how successful we have been on that, but I think that we are going to continue to strive

to make it more affordable and really are proud that we drove down the uninsured rate with the Affordable Care Act because we covered more people, thereby lowering costs because of not having so much uncompensated care.

So I am glad to see somebody saying “let's talk,” and let's put a proposal out there. Happy to continue to have a dialogue about any idea that helps us move forward.

You know, the issue is that so many Americans are, in this moment, right now, making these decisions, and how you effect that for the next 2 years is the biggest question.

And you and I know if we said: OK. We are huddling tomorrow or, you know, the Finance Committee is huddling tomorrow, then everybody up here would be trying to convince us not to do various things. So the question is, How can we protect the Marketplace in the next year or two in the simplest way and then get about us going back to business, talking to each other, trying to work out what are the best creative ideas for lowering health insurance costs?

I don't know why we haven't done a PBM bill. My colleague Senator GRASSLEY and I have a bill. I think you have a proposal. Other people have proposals. We are letting PBMs get away with so much in the expensive prescription drugs. I don't know why we don't spend all our time driving down the cost of health insurance.

I am happy to work creatively on ways to protect the market over the next 2 years so that we can finally get to some creative discussions. I thank the Senator.

Mr. CASSIDY. Thank you for the questions, and let me just respond very quickly.

I think the beauty of what I am proposing is it fits in very nicely with the insurance markets as they currently are. It doesn't require anything to change between now and January 1. It is too late to change those plans and those rates. It is just too late.

This does not require those rates to change. This would be something which could benefit our fellow Americans next year and could be implemented by then.

Yes, the bureaucracy is going to have to work hard. President Trump can get them to work hard.

You mentioned several other reforms. I am in total agreement. We should be working together—Democrats and Republicans, that is what we need to do to get something done—in order to come together for a set of proposals that will lower healthcare costs.

And both as a member of the Committee on Finance as well as the chairman of the HELP Committee, it is my intent do that. We have got to do that.

But this can work this year for Americans who are going to be on the exchanges, and that is my hope.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL TOMORROW Thereupon, the Senate, at 6:49 p.m.,

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under adjourned until Saturday, November 8,
the previous order, the Senate stands 2025, at 12 noon.
adjourned until 12 noon tomorrow.