

comes to infant formula for babies, 60 percent of the infant formula is sold through one government program called WIC—Women, Infants, and Children Program. It is a program that brings in pregnant mothers and moms with new babies and does its level best to make sure those babies are healthy and off to a good start in life.

In my State of Illinois, in the largest county, Cook County, 50,000 mothers depend on WIC—the WIC Program that provides the basics for healthy moms and healthy babies. The WIC Program runs out of money this month. When it does, the support for these families, for these moms, and for these babies is in danger.

Why are we doing this? Is this part of the Republican strategy—sick babies, mothers unprepared to deliver? Is that part of their strategy? Is that their leverage for what they want to achieve? If it is, I have three words for them: Enough is enough.

I just left my office where I had a group of people from my State visiting for whom I have a special affection. They are with what is known as the Primary Health Care Association, and I will bet the Chair has a similar association of some type in her State of North Dakota. These are the folks who open the clinics in the neighborhoods and small towns so that people who aren't wealthy have access to a doctor and a nurse. I love them, I just love them to pieces because they have invested their whole lives in helping folks who are often ignored. They told me that despite the sadness they feel, and even the anger over this government shutdown, there is a feeling of elation now that the insurance exchanges are open under the Affordable Care Act. They say people are coming in and saying: You won't believe it, but I qualify for health insurance for the first time in my life. These are the clients, these are the people they help every day, and now these people have the peace of mind of health insurance.

That drives some on the other side crazy—to think ObamaCare will go forward and provide this kind of help. In my State, over 250,000 people have already visited the Web sites. They are signing up now for health insurance, many of them for the first time. Ours isn't the most successful State. It appears that per capita the State of Kentucky is one of the most successful, with some 10,000 people already signing up for health insurance—health insurance they otherwise can't afford or don't have.

This is part of the debate in Washington. The Republicans, many of them, are arguing we have to shut down the government, we have to shut down ObamaCare, we have to stop these people from signing up for health insurance. It is not going to work. They cannot reverse history. This is a law that has been on the books almost 4 years, enacted by Congress, signed by the President, judged constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court—a law on

which we have had a referendum in a Presidential election. When President Obama stood up and said: I am going to fight for affordable health care and health care reform, and the Republican candidate said: I will abolish it, President Obama won that reelection by 5 million votes. That is the verdict of history. That is the judgment of the American people. That is how we guide a democracy.

There are some very wealthy, very extreme who will never accept the results of an election. They think with enough money they can overcome the voice of democracy. They are wrong, and that is why what we are setting about to do here is to reopen this government, pay our debts, and then work out whatever remains in terms of issues.

I ask my staff each morning to give me a list of what is happening because of this government shutdown. I can't keep up with it—I mean, page after page, issue after issue. Here is one. There is a major salmonella outbreak affecting hundreds of people in many States right now. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service has announced an estimated 278 people across 18 States, mostly in California, have been reported ill. They are working with the Centers for Disease Control, along with State and local officials, to track that. But that said, we have to understand that with a government shutdown these agencies are not fully staffed.

Families and children across America are vulnerable because of this Republican shutdown strategy. For some, it will mean an illness they will get over in a few days. For others, it could be more serious. The words of the chaplain ring in my ears: Enough is enough.

We keep hearing about this piecemeal approach of the House of Representatives, where when they see these ghastly headlines of bereaving families who are denied the basic benefits that we offer families of those who have fallen in service to America—when they face that embarrassment—they quickly manufacture a little spending bill to cover it, saying: Oh, we will take care of that one. Chuck E. Cheese's calls it whack-a-mole. And that is what they are doing. Each time a story pops up, they try to knock it back down.

The Center for American Progress has done a review of the 14 bills passed by the House. They find approximately \$83 billion in funding—just about \$6 billion a bill. The total amount of non-defense funding in the original House-passed continuing resolution was \$469 billion. Therefore, the House bills that already have passed and are currently under consideration make up less than 18 percent of the total. So for all the efforts of the House of Representatives, sending over these bills to react to embarrassments from their government shutdown, they can't keep up with it.

The simple honest answer is to open the government. We have passed the

bill and sent it to Speaker BOEHNER. He is living in political fear of calling that bill because he knows it will pass. The Democrats overwhelmingly will support it, and enough moderate Republicans will step up to reopen this government, and Speaker BOEHNER cannot accept that reality. He is afraid to call a vote.

How many more embarrassing moments will we have, reporting on situations such as these poor families who have given their all, who have lost their loved ones, and now they are asked to suffer because of the Republican shutdown? It has to come to an end.

Yesterday on the floor I appealed to moderate Republicans in the Senate to step up—step up and join us. We are going to have a bill before us in a short time—I hope sooner rather than later—that is going to avoid a default on America's debt. If we default on October 17, it will be the first time in the history of the United States that will have occurred. It will have a devastating impact on businesses, on jobs, and on the savings of Americans.

If you have a savings account, if you have a retirement account, have you been watching it over the last several days? Have you seen what the Republican shutdown has done for your plans, for your future and your family? This is unacceptable, and it will get dramatically worse unless we pass, in a bipartisan fashion, this extension of the debt limit for the United States of America. This will be a chance for moderate Republicans in the Senate to speak up and stand up.

Before I close, I want to say a special word about my colleague, my Republican Senate colleague MARK KIRK, who announced this week he would vote for a clean debt ceiling. I have said it back home, and I will say it here on the floor. It is the right thing to do for my colleague. It is the right thing to do for America. But I want to express my appreciation for his leadership. I hope his example of stepping up and saying he is going to put the country first before his party is one that will be followed by other Members on his side of the aisle.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

HEALTH CARE EXCHANGES

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Illinois, and I have heard him make reference to the insurance exchanges that opened last week. It was 1 week ago President Obama's health insurance exchanges opened, and by all accounts it was a complete disaster.

The administration had 3½ years to prepare for the big launch. It spent months and millions of dollars advertising the start date. Yet on October 1, the American people had their first chance to sign up, and the exchanges flopped. It was a complete fiasco.

The administration tried to say it was caught off guard. They said they were caught off guard by too many people going to the Web site on the first day. Even Saturday Night Live ridiculed the excuse. They said: That is like 1-800-Flowers getting caught off guard on Valentine's Day.

There were glitches the first day, but they lasted the whole week—the entire first week. The question is, Did the administration finally get its act together? Well, actually, no, it didn't. The past weekend they had to pull down the Web site to try to fix some of the worst problems. USA TODAY, a newspaper whose editorials have actually in the past supported the health care law, had as yesterday's headline: "Health sites generate more error messages than coverage." That was the headline. The subheadline: "Exchange launch turns into an inexcusable mess."

An inexcusable mess. And they go on: . . . the administration managed to turn the experience for most of those visitors into a nightmare. Websites crashed, refused to load, or offered bizarre and incomprehensible choices. Even though the system was shut down for repairs over the weekend, Monday's early reports continued to suggest an epic screw-up.

The front page of the Wall Street Journal on Monday read: "Software, Design Defects Cripple Health-Care Website."

One does not take down a Web site for minor glitches. These are signs of major trouble. Some of us have been warning that the administration has failed to prepare properly. We said there would be security holes that would expose people to fraud and identity theft. It turns out the administration didn't even get to the point where the security flaws would actually matter early on because people couldn't even start entering their personal information. The exchanges were failing to launch. People got repeated error messages, and they couldn't fill out forms or applications. They couldn't create an account to start looking at the most basic of information to even make comparisons. When they tried to telephone to get help, they found long wait times and they got disconnected entirely. Even the administration's biggest cheerleaders admitted defeat. One reporter at MSNBC spent so much time trying to show viewers how to sign up for the exchange Web site on line that she actually gave up. They were playing this on television. She finally threw in the towel saying:

If I were signing up for myself, this is where my patience would be exhausted.

The Wall Street Journal tried to find out what went wrong. It talked to computer experts, who looked at the healthcare.gov Web site, and what the computer experts said is, "The site appeared to be built on a sloppy software foundation." According to those experts, "such a hastily constructed website"—and, of course, they had 3½ years—"may not have been able to

withstand the online demand last week."

Even the far-left Wonkblog at the Washington Post couldn't believe how badly the administration had failed. One of its columnists wrote:

The Obama administration did itself—and the millions of people who wanted to explore signing up—a terrible disservice by building a Web site that, four days into launch, is still unusable for most Americans.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. President Obama promised using the exchanges would be like, in his words, shopping on amazon.com. Well, Amazon can handle 13 or 14 million transactions every day with no problem. There are over 5,000 Web sites generating more traffic than health care.gov.

So how many people were able to successfully enroll in the health care exchanges on the first day? We have no idea. The administration doesn't want to talk about it. First, they said: We are thrilled so many people were checking out the Web site. By Sunday, Treasury Secretary Jack Lew was on multiple television shows refusing to answer questions about how many people had enrolled and just repeating the White House talking points. He claimed 4.7 million people had visited.

If they are willing to tell us how many people have visited the Web site, why won't they tell us how many people actually got coverage?

The administration says they won't provide any data to back up its claims until at least November.

Remember, California claimed 5 million people visited their Web site for its own State exchange for the first day. They later had to back up and say that wasn't true. It turns out they had 645,000 visitors—less than 1 million, not the 5 million they claimed. That is a State that spent \$313 million on their site and it couldn't handle even that many people, because they had trouble.

President Obama said he was going to have the most transparent administration in history. The health care law is this administration's signature accomplishment. October 1 was the day they had been working toward for more than 3 years, and now the President won't tell the American people—won't tell any of us how many people have even signed up for health insurance. Why not? What is the President trying to hide?

CNN looked into the 24 States that set up their own insurance exchanges under the law. They found that as of last Friday, about 52,000 applications had been started. That is not how many people have actually completed their application successfully; it is just they have started. It is not how many people have gotten insurance; that is just how many people get to the point of starting their application.

Even if the Obama administration fixes the technical problems with its health insurance Web site, it will not have fixed the many problems with its health care law. The law will still not

give people the lower cost, high-quality care they wanted—which is the reason we needed health care reform in the first place. But I think the American people will hold the President to his promises and hold the Washington Democrats who voted for this law to their promises.

The President, right before the exchanges opened, said coverage in the exchanges should cost less than your cell phone bill. He said you should be able to keep your doctor. And he said it would be as easy and secure as amazon.com. So far, the President's health care law has failed on all of these. That was exactly what many of us warned would happen.

It doesn't matter if the ObamaCare exchange system failures happened because of heavy traffic or because of design flaws. The administration officials should be embarrassed, but they should not be surprised. Republicans warned the exchanges were not ready for prime time, but the President and Democrats ignored calls for a delay.

Why is the administration insisting now on fining people—fining people who don't have insurance, even though they can't sign up on the Web site successfully? The President unilaterally gave big businesses a 1-year delay in the employer mandate. Workers should get the same break that bosses get. If bosses get a 1-year delay in penalties, why shouldn't hard-working men and women all across the country get a 1-year delay of the individual mandate?

President Obama should have delayed the launch of his insurance exchange until it was ready. That would have been the fair thing to do. It is still the right thing to do. It is also the fair and right thing to give individual Americans the same delay of the mandate that the President has unilaterally—without the action of Congress—given to businesses all around this country.

Madam President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam 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.

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, yesterday the Veterans Affairs Administration announced it would furlough 7,000 Veterans Benefits Administration employees, and as a result activities and services in the following areas would be suspended: The education call center, personal interviews and hearings at regional offices, education and vocational counseling, outreach programs including at military facilities, the VetSuccess Program on campuses.

But this announcement is only the beginning of the contraction in the