

ObamaCare because of the cuts to their Medicare Advantage plans.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. AYOTTE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

IRAN

Ms. AYOTTE. Madam President, I come to the floor today to talk about a grave threat to the United States of America, a grave threat to the world, and a grave threat to our friend and ally, the State of Israel; that is, the threat of Iran's nuclear weapons program.

As we stand here today, pending has been legislation filed by Senator RICHARD BURR which contains important sanctions which are essentially an insurance policy to make sure that Tehran does not play the United States of America and that they are, in fact, serious about stopping their nuclear weapons program. Unfortunately, there is a long history with Iran where we talk and they enrich. This is why it is so important right now that we have this insurance policy.

These sanctions pending would only go in place if Iran violates the interim agreement that has been entered into between the administration and other countries in the world and Iran and if they fail to reach a final agreement that is acceptable to the security interests of the United States of America and to our allies in the region to make the world a safer place.

We cannot accept a nuclear-capable Iran. Why is that? Iran is a country that has threatened to wipe the State of Israel off the face of the Earth. Iran has called our country "the Great Satan." Iran is the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism. They have supported terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. They have, unfortunately, obviously worked against our strong ally Israel. They have supported the murderous Assad regime, providing Assad arms so he can murder his own people.

Unfortunately, there are so many examples of the danger of Iran having nuclear weapons capability. If Iran gets this capability, unfortunately we will also find ourselves in a position where we are in a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, a Sunni-Shia arms race, which would then also threaten the world and make that region even more of a tinderbox.

So we now find ourselves at a critical moment. I am deeply worried that the sanctions regime this Congress has worked so hard to put in place on a strong bipartisan basis is unraveling and we need an insurance policy to make sure Iran knows they are not

going to play us and unravel these sanctions. The way we can do that is by having sanctions legislation passed which is prospective.

If Iran is serious about a nuclear weapons agreement that takes away their capability of having a nuclear weapon, then they should not have a problem with prospective sanctions by this Congress. Again, those sanctions would only go in place if they violate the interim agreement. If their words mean anything, then they shouldn't have a problem with the fact that we are just saying: If you violate it, we will impose additional sanctions. We will not allow this sanctions regime to unravel.

What is the significance of this sanctions regime? The work done by this Congress on a bipartisan basis and with our partners around the world is what has brought Iran to the table. All of us want a diplomatic resolution that stops Iran from having a nuclear weapon, but we need to go into this with clear eyes, which is why having this insurance policy is so important. A final agreement with Iran will only be meaningful if it ensures they will not have the ability to enrich because their ability to enrich makes it easier for them to immediately ramp up to nuclear weapons capability.

I recently attended a security conference in Munich and met with some representatives of the Arab nations. They were asked in an open forum: If an agreement is reached and Iran is allowed to enrich, what will the rest of you want to do? Their answer was that they will want the right to enrich too.

This final agreement must stop Iran's ability to enrich. If we do not stop them, we will not only face the risk of Iran being able to quickly ramp up to a nuclear weapon and its capability to harm the world but also the risk that the Arab nations themselves will also enrich. Even if they don't have a nuclear weapon capability, they are all right at the point where they could break out to that capability, and that is just as dangerous for the world.

The amendment we have makes it clear that we are going to protect the United States of America and protect our allies and the world. It has to be clear. It should prevent Iran from that enrichment capability. This agreement should stop their capability at the Arak facility to produce plutonium. Our agreement should absolutely make sure we are given access to their military facilities so we can stop them from their programs where they are working on weaponization of nuclear materials.

I serve on the Senate Armed Services Committee. The Director of National Intelligence and others have told us that by 2015 Iran could have ICBM capability. Can you imagine if they were to continue with this nuclear program and have ICBM capability? This is a true risk to the world.

An agreement is only meaningful if it is an agreement we can rely on, that is

open, transparent, verifiable, and absolutely stops them from having a nuclear program that could be a threat to the world. We need to make sure they stop enrichment and put a stop on the Arak plutonium reactor and weaponization program. We need full and open access.

We should be addressing Iran's acts of terrorism throughout the world. One of the grave dangers I worry about is that if Iran has a nuclear weapon, they may not use it, but they may pass it on to the terrorist groups that Iran is associated with, and that is a grave danger not only to our ally Israel but also to the United States of America.

One of the reasons I believe the sanctions legislation that is pending is so important is because some of the statements that have been made recently by the regime in Tehran are very troubling and harken back to their prior behavior of we talk, they enrich. We have to question how serious they are about a verifiable, transparent, and real agreement to stop their nuclear weapons program.

For example, on February 18—in talks between Iran and the P5+1 that were held in Vienna—Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the talks "will not lead anywhere." In advance of the talks, President Ruhani, whom Prime Minister Netanyahu has described as a wolf in sheep's clothing—and I would agree with him on that—has stated that peaceful atomic research would be pursued forever.

Iran's Foreign Minister recently clashed with a lead U.S. negotiator, Wendy Sherman, over the Arak and Fordow facilities. Sherman stated that Iran had no need for either facility. Make no mistake, if Iran is serious about giving up its nuclear weapons capability—or the pursuit of that capability—then she is absolutely right; there is no need for the Arak facility that allows them to produce plutonium. There is no need for these underground facilities such as Fordow, where they are trying to hide their program from the rest of the world.

The Foreign Minister of Iran, in reaction to her comments, described her statement as "worthless" and reinforced Iran's position that their ability to produce atomic energy at the plutonium reactor at Arak is not negotiable.

This is deeply troubling, and it is one of the reasons we need to send a clear message here and now. They came to the table because of sanctions. The sanctions were having a deteriorating effect on their economy. Yet recently we have seen—and this has been my fear—the sanctions regime unraveling. They are actually using this negotiation with the administration to further unravel those sanctions in order to get what they want without an insurance policy to ensure that we will get what we want, and that is what this sanction legislation does.

One of the issues that came up in February, a French trade delegation—representing 116 French companies—

traveled to Tehran. I recently met with one of the Arab nation's Foreign Ministers, and he told me that the hotel rooms in Tehran are filled with business men and women looking to line up to do business with Tehran.

This is a real issue that the sanctions regime is starting to unravel, and the legislation we have pending with 59 cosponsors is an insurance policy to say: If you are not serious about this agreement, we will impose further sanctions to make sure we do everything we can to stop you from having nuclear weapons capability.

This is a critical moment in the history of this country. This is a critical moment for the safety of the world. We want to stop Iran from using diplomatic means as a way to have nuclear weapons capability because of the risk it presents to the world.

We cannot be naive. We have to understand the prior behavior of Iran because the prior behavior of Iran will allow us to go in with our eyes wide open rather than just taking their assurances that they are serious about a nuclear weapons agreement that will stop them from having this capability.

As we stand on the floor, I ask the majority leader to allow a vote on this legislation so we can send a clear message to Iran and the rest of the world that they should not think they should do further business with Iran unless Iran is serious about giving up its nuclear weapons program through a transparent, verifiable agreement that will ensure they cannot threaten the State of Israel and the rest of the world with a nuclear weapon. I ask the majority leader to allow a vote on this important legislation.

There are so few pieces of legislation that come through the Senate which actually have 59 cosponsors. This is one of them. It certainly has strong bipartisan support.

I don't buy the argument that if we were to pass this legislation, somehow Iran would walk away from the negotiations. If Iran walks away from the negotiations because we pass prospective legislation as an insurance policy to make sure they are serious about a real, verifiable agreement that stops their nuclear weapons program, then, frankly, we know they have been playing us. Because the reality is, if they are serious, they should not care if we put an insurance policy out there. If they are serious, they will follow through and will do what the interim agreement requires and will agree to a final agreement that stops their nuclear weapons program in a transparent, verifiable way once and for all.

On the other hand, if they are just going to walk away with a threat of prospective sanctions, how serious can they be? We will still have the sanctions in place that will continue to put pressure on them to say the United States of America and our allies will not accept a nuclear-armed Iran because of the threat it presents to us.

We cannot allow the largest state sponsor—and most serious state spon-

sor—of terrorism around the world to have this capability. We cannot allow a race in the Middle East—a Sunni-Shia race—to see who can have a nuclear weapon first because of the danger it presents to the world.

Finally, we cannot allow Iran to continue to threaten our friend and ally, the State of Israel. I understand and appreciate that when Iran and its leaders have made statements they want to annihilate Israel from the face of the Earth, our friends in Israel take that very seriously. They have vowed never again. We stand with them not only for their friendship but also for the safety of the world.

We have legislation pending on the floor that gives us an opportunity to make it clear what the United States of America stands for and that we will not accept a nuclear-armed Iran. They must be serious or there will be consequences in terms of economic sanctions.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

HEALTH CARE

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, yesterday we received news that 4 million people have now signed up in private health care exchanges all across the country. In addition, it was released that about 12 million people have called the call centers in January alone, and 1.1 million people signed up to receive health care through the Affordable Care Act during that time. Young enrollment—the group of individuals for which there has always been a question as to whether they are going to sign up for these exchanges—grew by 65 percent.

It is time for this body to recognize the Affordable Care Act is working. It is working for people who have been desperate to get insurance. It is working for people who have been getting the short end of the stick from insurance companies, and it is working for millions of seniors all across this country who have been paying far too much for prescription drug costs and for preventive health care.

We have known this from the very beginning in Connecticut. Despite the hiccups over enrollment in the fall period, States such as Connecticut that had made a commitment to making this law work, rather than undermining it, have seen the success from day one. Connecticut, at the outset, said that we were going to try to enroll between October 1 and March 31 about 80,000 people. That was our goal. We just announced in Connecticut—a

State that is working to implement the law, not undermine the law—that we didn't just hit 80,000, we didn't just hit 100,000, but we have enrolled 126,000 Connecticut residents in our health care exchanges and in Medicaid. Our projection is that we are going to enroll 150,000 people by March 31. That is nearly double our initial estimate. Last week, traffic on Connecticut's Web site rose 31 percent, and the daily enrollments rose by 67 percent.

The stories just keep on coming into our office about the lives that are being changed as people, for the first time in their lives, get access to affordable health care. People such as Susie Clayton, who has been dealing with a cancer diagnosis for over a decade—a crippling, preexisting condition that for most of her adult life has kept her out of the ranks of the insured. I have known Susie for probably two decades. Almost every single conversation I have had with Susie over those 20 years has been about her daily struggle to try to deal with her illness and her preexisting condition. Every single day, every single week, she has thought about whether she is going to be able to pay for her health care if she has a reoccurrence of her cancer and whether during that time she is going to have a job that provides her with insurance.

Susie had been paying about \$1,700 a month at last count for an insurance plan she could afford. Her life changed on January 1. She now is paying a couple hundred dollars a month in premiums. She finally gets to wake up every day not having to worry about whether she is going to be able to afford coverage, whether she is going to be able to see a doctor to deal with her very difficult diagnosis. With 4 million people now enrolled in these exchanges across the country, that story can be replicated over and over.

A bunch of our Republican colleagues have come to the floor over the last couple of days—I was in the presiding chair yesterday listening to some speeches—regarding some new information about Medicare Advantage. Everybody knows by now that included in the health care bill was an end to the subsidies given to Medicare Advantage plans. The private sector in health care and in other industries always tells us they can do things more cheaply than the Federal Government—and a lot of times they are right about that—but it was exactly the opposite when it came to Medicare Advantage. We were paying private insurance companies 13 percent more than it costs the Federal Government to run Medicare. This was a source of enormous profit for the insurance companies. It didn't make sense to oversubsidize insurance companies to run a program the Federal Government itself was running for 13 percent less money. So we ended those subsidies, and part of the elimination of those subsidies has gone into effect.

But the story that is being told on the floor today isn't true. The fact is that since the Affordable Care Act was