

NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH IRAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, the purpose of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act is to ensure Congress has a fully informed understanding of any comprehensive agreement reached between the administration and Iran. These are principles both parties endorsed when they voted overwhelmingly to pass that measure earlier this year. These are principles President Obama endorsed when he signed it into law. These are principles that need to be upheld.

That is why I recently joined Speaker BOEHNER, Senator COTTON, and Congressman POMPEO in calling on the administration to comply with the terms of this law by providing the Senate with the text of the two side agreements reached between Iran and the IAEA. That was more than a week ago, but we still have yet to receive it. Without this critical information, Republicans and Democrats in Congress may not be able to properly assess such a highly consequential deal with Iran. That is simply not acceptable. The administration needs to turn over the side agreements without delay. Let me say that again. The administration needs to turn over the side agreements without delay.

Even considering all this, the Senate has already begun its necessary oversight of the deal that will soon be before us. The Armed Services Committee held a hearing yesterday on the strategic and military implications of the deal. The Foreign Relations Committee also held a hearing yesterday to consider the alternatives to this agreement.

Today it will consider the implications of sanctions relief for Iran, along with Congress's ability to impose additional sanctions if Tehran persists in its support of terrorism. The Intelligence Committee has already embarked on a series of briefings and hearings that will help Congress determine whether the deal can even be verified.

As the review moves forward, we will continue working to assess the relative threat posed to the Greater Middle East and to the United States by an Iranian regime empowered with a threshold nuclear program and billions of dollars of additional resources. I know this worries a lot of Members in both parties.

Consider what the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee said just this week:

I'm troubled that what this essentially does is after fifteen years it legitimizes Iran as a nuclear threshold state. After fifteen years Iran can produce weapons-grade highly-enriched uranium without limitations and that is disturbing because what that means to me is it really doesn't prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon. It just postpones it.

That is the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He is not the only Democrat or Republican with these types of concerns. We will keep working for answers.

We will also keep pressing for a more fulsome revelation of the true extent of the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program.

Understanding Iran's relative trustworthiness in the past will be critical to determining Iran's potential for trustworthiness in the future—whether, for instance, it can truly be trusted to live up to its commitments in today's agreement. Getting a fuller picture of Iran's past nuclear activities and research will also be important to ensuring the U.N. Security Council, which rushed to approve the comprehensive deal, has a more comprehensive understanding moving forward.

We will continue working hard to assess this agreement on behalf of the American people who absolutely deserve a say in a deal of this magnitude. At the end, Congress will take a vote and answer a simple but powerful question: Will this agreement actually make America and its allies safer?

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF MEDICARE AND MEDICAID

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Republicans called it “the beginning of socialized medicine.” The Wall Street Journal accused Democrats and the President of “politicking with a nation's health.” One Republican Senator called the health care law “brazen socialism.”

Further:

It is not needed. It is socialism. It moves the country in a direction which is not good for anyone, whether they be young or old. It charts a course from which there will be no turning back. . . . It is not only socialism—it is brazen socialism.

You would think that based on the 50-plus times of trying to overturn ObamaCare, that is what the Republican Senators were talking about, but, no, that was Medicare. They weren't talking about ObamaCare; Medicare is what they were talking about.

Fifty years ago, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law Medicare and Medicaid. At that time, conservatives believed that access to health care through government was the worst possible decision any elected official could make—and so many Republicans, the same thing. In fact, Republicans still do feel that way. Even after decades of Medicare's success, they are still clamoring for the program's elimination or massive changes.

Jeb Bush—a frontrunner for the Republican Presidential nomination—called for “phasing out” Medicare. Where did he do this? At a Koch brothers rally in New Hampshire. Jeb Bush—a frontrunner for the Republican Presidential nomination—said let's phase out Medicare. How about that one?

For half a century, Republicans have continued to attack Medicare, despite all the good it has done. They have tried to privatize Medicare and turn it into a voucher system and reduce benefits for seniors. Republicans attacked the closing of the prescription drug doughnut hole and elimination of cost-sharing for preventative coverage simply because they were improvements made by the Affordable Care Act.

Republicans have repeatedly sought to destroy Medicaid, and Republican Governors have turned back millions of Federal dollars and denied their citizens, the most needy of all, coverage simply because of ideology.

This week they renewed their never-ending assault on women's health by trying to defund Planned Parenthood in reaction to a radical rightwing crusade by an extremist group. American women value Planned Parenthood because they know Planned Parenthood provides vital health care services to millions of women, but Republicans are choosing to disseminate access to the health services of women. Women need this health care to stay healthy.

Why are they doing it? I guess, to further their political agenda. When will the Republican attack on effective health care programs end?

Medicare and Medicaid have positively affected and even saved millions of Americans' lives. Before Medicare, nearly half of all seniors age 65 and older were uninsured. The elderly were discriminated against simply because of their age. If you were fortunate enough to have health insurance, you paid over 50 percent of the cost straight out of your pocket.

My first elected job was from Clark County. That is in Las Vegas, NV. I was chosen to be a member of the board of trustees of Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital—the largest hospital district in Nevada. After a year or so, I became chairman of the board of trustees. I was there when Medicare came into being. Prior to Medicare, more than 40 percent of all seniors who came into our hospital were required to have a brother, a son, a daughter, a mother, a father, a husband, a wife or a neighbor sign on the dotted line, saying: If that bill is not paid, we will guarantee it is paid.

We had a collection department in that hospital that was very aggressive and went after these people. That is how bad it was for seniors, but today, 50 years later, about 99 percent of seniors are insured and go to the hospital when they need care.

The cost during their working years is a small amount of out-of-pocket costs. The program that we call Medicare is a lifeline. Before Medicare and Medicaid, health care for millions of younger Americans was subject to racism and discrimination. A White American was 30 percent more likely to be admitted to a hospital than an African American. In fact, in many cases emergency response calls were subject to race confirmation before action. They

wanted to know where you lived, and if the color of your skin wasn't just right when you were brought to the hospital, you went on your way. Today the disparity in hospitalization rates between minorities and White Americans has decreased significantly.

Medicare and Medicaid have protected the health and well-being of millions of seniors, individuals with disabilities, low-income individuals, and millions of children.

In the past 50 years, Medicaid has grown to be the Nation's primary health insurance program for low-income individuals and families. Medicaid has grown to cover nearly 70 million Americans, including more than 40 million children.

Today Medicaid covers nearly half of all births in the United States and ensures that children receive the health care they desperately need in the early stages of their lives. By providing early childhood health care to millions, Medicaid has improved the long-term health of children and contributed to their overall quality of life.

Medicaid has also provided health care and long-term services to 16 million low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities. Medicaid pays for services that Medicare does not cover. It ensures that low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities have access to a wide variety of services. These options allow them to remain in their communities rather than relocate to nursing homes. But when they do have to go to a nursing home, the vast majority of people in convalescent centers in America are Medicaid recipients.

Sadly, 22 States have chosen not to expand Medicaid coverage, and this decision has hurt millions of people who can't afford health care any other way. Why do States and the Republican Governors of those States oppose this? Because it is part of ObamaCare.

To his credit, the conservative Republican Governor from the State of Nevada, Brian Sandoval, was one of the first Governors to sign on to this program. He didn't care if it was a Democratic program or a Republican program; it helped people in Nevada who needed help. I truly admire him for doing that. The expansion of Medicaid in States throughout the country would boost States' economic activity—and Brian Sandoval knows that—and create job growth, in addition to providing quality, affordable health care to vulnerable Americans. The State of Nevada is a relatively sparsely populated State. Almost 200,000 people are receiving the health care they need and would not have but for ObamaCare and Governor Brian Sandoval.

Medicaid expansion would benefit every State. The Affordable Care Act transformed Medicaid into a true safety net for vulnerable Americans. We should be expanding this coverage, not restricting it for partisan gain.

Medicare and Medicaid have protected Americans for 50 years, and our

Nation is healthier and stronger because of its existence. But despite 50 years of undeniable Medicare and Medicaid success, Republicans remain committed to ending access to health care for those who need it the most.

We will be celebrating ObamaCare's success 50 years from now while Republicans call for the Affordable Care Act to be phased out, like Jeb Bush wants. In 50 years, will there be a Republican Presidential wanna-be out there saying "Let's get rid of ObamaCare; let's phase it out"? I hope not.

Republicans have repeatedly engaged in politically motivated attacks designed to undermine the law that transformed our Nation's health care system. The Affordable Care Act has helped millions of Americans to gain access to quality health care. Since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, 16.4 million Americans have gotten quality health care—many of them for the first time in their lives. The United States has seen the largest decline in the uninsured rate in decades, if not forever. In the last 18 months, the uninsured rate for nonelderly adults has fallen by 35 percent. Health care costs have grown at their slowest rate in 50 years. Patient safety initiatives are keeping Americans safe.

The Affordable Care Act is working. It is the law of the land, and that is not going to change. There have been more than 50 votes to repeal or undermine the Affordable Care Act and there have been repeated challenges to this law before the courts, but we have won on every level. The American people have won twice with the stamp of approval by the Supreme Court. Last month we witnessed the Supreme Court rule, as I have indicated, again for the second time in favor of the Affordable Care Act. It is here to stay. It is here to stay because the American people want affordable health care.

American seniors need affordable, accessible health care coverage, and they need it right now.

Five decades ago—50 years ago—President Johnson said:

No longer will older Americans be denied the healing miracle of modern medicine. No longer will illness crush and destroy the savings they have so carefully put away over a lifetime so that they might enjoy dignity in their later years. No longer will young families see their own incomes, and their own hopes eaten away simply because they are carrying out their deep moral obligations to their parents, and to their uncles, and their aunts.

The Republicans have spent the last five decades fighting against President Johnson's dream. The Republicans are determined to roll back access to health care for Americans. It is hard to believe, but it is true. Just this week the Senate held a vote on whether to repeal this lifesaving program—again. It is clear that after 50 years, the Republicans have learned nothing.

We should be building on the success of Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act. We need to be expanding coverage to all Americans. We should

be encouraging States to expand Medicaid access. Democrats are committed—just as President Johnson was half a century ago—to giving Americans the health care they need and deserve.

Will the Chair announce the schedule for today.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 22, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 22) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12 p.m. will be equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, soon we will vote on final passage of a bill that will provide a long-term solution to the shortfalls of the highway trust fund. If enacted, this bill will provide the longest paid-for authorization of highway and transportation spending in nearly a decade.

This bill is the result of an incredible amount of work by a number of Senators, including our distinguished majority leader as well as the chairman and ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee. I commend them for setting aside partisan differences to find a solution despite the cynicism and naysaying from some of our colleagues and others here in Washington.

I am also pleased to have been able to play a part in these efforts, working with Leader MCCONNELL to identify suitable offsets to pay for the reauthorization of the highway and transit programs. While the Finance Committee, which I chair, has jurisdiction over the funding stream for the highway trust fund, we had to cull together offsets from other areas and other committees in order to pay for this multiyear highway bill. This required the cooperation of multiple chairmen and committees, all working together toward a common goal.

One of the most remarkable things about this bill is that it provides 3 full years of highway funding without raising taxes or adding to the deficit. We have heard time and again that a long-term highway bill would only be possible if we included a big tax increase. With the upcoming final vote on this