

sanctions against those who contribute to the escalation of violence and act as spoilers to a political solution. It sent a strong message to all parties that continued violence will not be tolerated and that an inclusive dialogue—one that includes the Burundian opposition that has taken refuge outside the country—is the only way to restore stability. The United Nations Security Council took a much needed step by approving a resolution in late November. The European Union has been forward leaning, imposing sanctions on government officials and requesting a dialogue with the government to discuss the current situation under the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement related to democracy and human rights.

The United States has been actively engaged in preventive action and diplomacy for some time. On November 23, President Obama issued an Executive order sanctioning four individuals whose actions have threatened the peace and security of Burundi. He also announced that as of January, Burundi will no longer be eligible for preferential trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Our Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, Tom Perriello, has been in the region numerous times. High-ranking officials, including our United Nations Ambassador and the Secretary of State have raised Burundi with our international partners on numerous occasions. Ambassador Power has traveled there herself, and I applaud the administration's consistent attention to the concerns of Burundi.

However, the violence continues. We must redouble our efforts to support a political solution to this current crisis. Let me be clear. There is no substitute for a commitment by the Burundians themselves when it comes to finding a way forward. They themselves must choose the path of peace, but I firmly believe we, in cooperation with our international partners, can provide the right incentives for them to do that. We can take other meaningful actions in pursuit of an agreement.

First, we must help the African Union to finalize contingency plans for an African-led mission to prevent widespread violence in the country.

Second, I call upon the AU to convene a meeting with special envoys from the United Nations, African Union, United States, European Union, and Belgium, as well as representatives from the East African community, to discuss coordination among donors, the United Nations, the AU, and the Security Council's recommendations and to identify ways that the international actors can support the increased number of human rights monitors and military observers authorized by the AU in October.

Third, it is imperative that we help put in place mechanisms for accountability for those who have engaged in extrajudicial killings during this period of time. Those who have committed these atrocities must be held

accountable. The international community must be firm about this. We cannot allow those who perpetrate these crimes to go unpunished.

The United States has made a promise to actively prevent the commission of mass atrocities. As the unrest continues, people are suffering in refugee camps or living in fear in their homes, afraid to go out. Violence is on the rise, the economy is in a downward spiral, and civil space is closed. Every day that goes by without a civil solution the probability of atrocities increases. Preventing widespread violence and mass atrocities is everyone's business. Diplomatic engagement to prevent political violence that has the potential to become ethnically based killing is exactly what we and the rest of the international community must focus on addressing.

I submit to you that acting to prevent this from happening is all of our collective business, and I urge continued action to do so.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FLAKE). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

OBAMACARE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, 5 years ago, days after President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, the senior Democratic Senator from New York went on "Meet the Press" to discuss the bill. He told the host: "Well, I think as people learn about the bill, and now that the bill is enacted, it's going to become more and more popular." I don't need to tell anyone that never happened.

Five years after ObamaCare was enacted, a majority of Americans disapproved the law, and that is a pattern we have seen since the law's passage. Why has the law failed to earn the support Democrats predicted? For one simple reason: The law is just not working as President Obama promised it would. The Affordable Care Act was supposed to lower health care premiums. It didn't. It was supposed to reduce health care costs. It didn't. It was supposed to protect the health care plans that Americans wanted to keep. It didn't. The law was sold as a health care solution, but it turned out to be yet another health care problem.

Five years after the law's passage, here is where we are: Americans with job-based insurance are paying more for their health care, with the average employee seeing a \$400 increase in his or her deductible since 2010. Small business employees have fared even worse, with average deductibles now close to \$2,000. And Americans are paying more for their premiums as well. An average annual premium contribu-

tion for family coverage is currently \$12,591, up from \$9,773 in 2010. That is nearly \$3,000 in additional premium costs or another \$250 a month. For many families, that comes on top of an increase in their deductible. Meanwhile, thousands of part-time workers have lost their job-based insurance thanks to ObamaCare mandates that encouraged several large employers to stop offering health benefits to part-time employees.

The situation with the exchanges is no better. Exchange premiums will rise once again this year, with many Americans facing rate increases in the double digits.

Over the past few months, I have heard from numerous constituents wondering how they will be able to afford the massive premium increases they are facing. One constituent in Wessington, SD, wrote to tell me that her and her husband's health care plan is going from \$17,194 this year to a staggering \$25,370 next year. That is an annual increase of more than \$8,000. What family can afford an \$8,000 increase in expenses from one year to the next?

Another constituent of mine wrote to tell me this:

We just received our rate increase for our family health insurance. We have been paying \$1,283 a month and the \$557.45 increase will bring it up to \$1,841.26. This amount has gone from 26 percent to 37 percent of our income. It is over twice of our house payment. . . . After having insurance coverage for the past 38 years, we are faced with dropping coverage, which is ironic since that is not the purpose of the Affordable Care Act. We are considering dropping insurance and facing the penalty just so we can continue to live in our house, pay our bills, and buy groceries.

That is from a constituent of mine in South Dakota.

I have received far too many letters like these from individuals who are facing enormous premium increases.

Another constituent wrote to me and said they are facing a 69-percent premium increase—69 percent. She and her husband are facing a \$22,884 insurance bill. She could buy a brand-new car for less than that.

So it is no surprise that a recent survey from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that nearly 80 percent of uninsured Americans who have looked for insurance report that they cannot find or cannot afford to buy health insurance. The grim reality for millions of Americans is that the Affordable Care Act is anything but affordable.

Unfortunately, higher health care costs are just one of the problems with this law. ObamaCare has already reduced Americans' health care choices. Faced with expensive ObamaCare mandates, insurance companies have chosen one of the few methods left to them to control costs, and that is restricting consumers' choice of doctors and hospitals. Americans were promised they could keep the doctor they liked, but for many Americans, that is not true.

Then there are the taxes imposed by the law. Because the administration did its best to hide the true cost of ObamaCare, many Americans don't realize that the law hiked taxes by \$1 trillion. In fact, the law imposed almost a dozen new taxes, including an annual tax on health insurance that is passed on to consumers in the form of higher premiums, a tax increase on flexible spending accounts and health savings accounts, and a tax on wages and self-employment income. President Obama promised not to raise taxes on those making less than \$250,000, but, as we all know, he broke that promise many times over when ObamaCare was signed into law. Many of these taxes directly impact low- and middle-income families.

Additionally, the law's tax on the makers of lifesaving medical devices, such as pacemakers and insulin pumps, which went into effect in 2013, has already eliminated jobs in the medical device industry and driven up the price of essential medical equipment.

The medical device industry is not the only industry in which ObamaCare is costing jobs. ObamaCare's requirement that employers provide their workers with government-approved insurance or pay a tax has made employing full-time workers more costly, which has discouraged employers from hiring. Workers in the retail and restaurant industries, many of them younger, less skilled workers, have been hit particularly hard. In all, the Congressional Budget Office has predicted that ObamaCare will result in the equivalent of 2 million fewer full-time jobs in 2017 and 2.5 million fewer full-time jobs by 2024. That is not good news for our already sluggish economy.

All Americans remember the President's claim that under ObamaCare, "If you like your plan, you can keep it"—a claim that was named, interestingly enough, PolitiFact's "Lie of the Year" in 2013 after ObamaCare eliminated the health care plans of 4 million Americans. Now hundreds of thousands of Americans will be losing their ObamaCare health care plan after a number of the health insurance co-ops established under the law proved unsustainable. In all, 12 of the 23 health care co-ops established by the President's health care law have collapsed, resulting in the loss of billions in taxpayer dollars, in addition to the loss of Americans' health plans. Taxpayers have also lost more than \$1 billion spent on failed or failing State exchanges, such as the failed exchanges in the States of Oregon, Hawaii, Vermont, Maryland, and Massachusetts.

Four years after telling "Meet the Press" that ObamaCare would become "more and more popular," the senior Senator from New York admitted that the Democrats had made a strategic error by focusing on ObamaCare. Americans, he admitted, were "crying out for an end to the recession, for better wages and more jobs; not for changes

in their health care." The senior Senator from New York is right.

Americans didn't want ObamaCare then, and they certainly don't want it now. ObamaCare is broken, and Americans know it. It is time to repeal this law and start moving toward the kind of health care reform Americans are actually looking for: an affordable, accountable, patient-focused system that gives individuals control of their health care decisions.

This week the Senate will take up a repeal bill that will begin the process of lifting the burdens ObamaCare has placed on Americans. I look forward to debating the bill and working with my colleagues to begin building a bridge to a better health care system for hard-working families across the country. It is time to give the American people the real health care reform they deserve.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

AMERICAN SECURITY AGAINST FOREIGN ENEMIES ACT

Mr. KAINES. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act of 2015. This act was passed by the House shortly before we recessed for Thanksgiving—an act dealing with the refugee crisis from Syria and Iraq. It is an act that is sort of pending before the body now as we try to decide whether to take up the House bill or take up the topic of the House bill as part of the deliberations in which we are engaged.

First, I think everyone in this body and everyone in the House acknowledges the security needs of America in this challenging time as we are engaged in a battle against ISIL. As we have seen in recent weeks, the reach of ISIL—whether it is a passenger aircraft in Sinai, a neighborhood in southern Beirut, or multiple neighborhoods in Paris, ISIL's strength is expanding and mutating, and we have to take those concerns seriously.

I applaud the work that has already been done to try to make sure the vetting process for refugees who entered the United States is pretty intense. Four million refugees left Syria during the course of the Syrian civil war. Of those 4 million who have left and registered with the U.N., after a fairly extensive review process, the U.N. has referred 20,000 to the United States for possible consideration to be refugees. Of those 20,000, after an 18-month vetting process, we have allowed approximately 2,000 into the United States. So the vetting process for refugees is pretty intense. If we can make it better, we need to do that, but it is already fairly significant. I also applaud efforts the administration announced yesterday and that other colleagues, including the Presiding Officer, are working on to ensure that the visa waiver program we currently have, which allows citizens from 38 countries to come to the United States without visas, is tight.

We have to do our best in a careful and deliberate way to make sure our security in the midst of this battle against ISIL is strong.

I rise today to speak particularly about this act because I think it is problematic, and I think it is problematic from the very title of the act. I think it raises some questions we have to be very careful about.

Syrian and Iraqi refugees are not foreign enemies. Refugees are not the enemies of the United States. We have an enemy. The enemy is ISIL. We are coming up on the start of a 17-month war against ISIL that Congress has been unwilling to debate, vote on, and declare. ISIL is an enemy, and we would all acknowledge that, but the refugees who are leaving Syria and Iraq are not our enemies. They are victims. They are victims. I think before we go down the path of quickly—and this bill was passed in the House in just a couple of days—painting with a broad brush as our enemies these poor people who have suffered so much, we really need to reflect on what they have been through.

This refugee crisis in Syria has been called by most NGOs and other organizations like the U.N. the greatest humanitarian crisis since World War II.

In a country of between 25 and 30 million people, 4 million have had to flee because of the atrocities of the Assad regime and the atrocities of the civil war carried out by ISIL and other terrorist organizations.

Four million had to leave their homes and 8 million more had to leave their homes and move to other places in their country where they would prefer not to live because their homes are unsafe because of the civil war.

Nearly 300,000 Syrians have been killed in this civil war, and the atrocities are horrible. The Assad regime uses barrel bombs in civilian neighborhoods to kill innocents without any rhyme or reason as to where or when they are going to fall, creating psychological terror as well as physical danger. ISIL in Syria is carrying out beheadings and the forced subjugation of people and selling them into sexual slavery. It is the oppression of religious minorities, virtually any religion other than that of the Sunni extremists who would fit within ISIL's narrow definition of who they think true believers are. This is what people are fleeing from.

This Senator emphasizes this point: Refugees are not our enemies. They are not foreign enemies. They are victims who deserve compassion.

This is a fairly famous photograph from a suburb of Damascus, Yarmouk, that is filled with Palestinian refugees who have been waiting for food. The Assad regime had cordoned them off and would not allow humanitarian aid because they thought there were opponents to the regime in this neighborhood.