

For 7½ years, Senate Republicans have blocked anything President Obama has proposed, including now a new Supreme Court Justice. Now, by preventing the Court from having nine Justices, Republicans are bringing gridlock in the legislative branch to the judicial branch. Previously, for the whole time Obama has been President, they were blocking what has gone on in the legislative branch. They have now broadened that to deadlock the Supreme Court. This is not acceptable. Justice delayed, we have heard, is justice denied, and that is certainly true. By bringing the Court to a standstill, Republicans are denying the justice all Americans deserve.

There is still time for my Republican colleagues to do the right thing—fill the Supreme Court vacancy—but to do that they must begin to process Garland's nomination. His questionnaire is here. It is filled out. It is done. I wonder how many Republicans have even looked at it. Has there been any? Shouldn't there be a hearing? The reason Republicans don't want a hearing is they know that a hearing, public in nature, would show the American people and the world what a good man Merrick Garland is, what a good lawyer he was, and what a good judge he has been, but they have to start processing this. Republicans seem to be refusing anything dealing with him. I think they should attend the meeting today on the Garland nomination organized by Judiciary Committee Democrats, calling on the finest people we can find to tell us what is going on in the judiciary.

My friend the Republican leader brings up Abner Mikva. Abner Mikva hasn't served in Congress in 40 years. He was a lawyer for President Clinton. We have been through quite a bit since then, but he has nothing else to refer to so he talks about Abner Mikva, who was going to come, who is not going to come. Do you think part of it can be he is more than 90 years old? Republicans should attend today's hearing.

The Judiciary chair, Senator GRASSLEY, should proceed with committee hearings. The American people deserve a full and transparent accounting of Merrick Garland's record and qualifications. After a hearing, of course we should move his nomination for a vote on the Senate floor. Every day that passes without confirmation, without a ninth Justice to serve on the Supreme Court, is another lost day for the Federal judiciary and American justice. Republicans claim their obstruction of President Obama's Supreme Court nominee is to give the people a voice, but their actions are doing just the opposite. Republicans are denying the American people the justice they deserve.

For example, take the cases they referred back to the lower courts. They have already done it and litigants have waited years to get before the Supreme Court. Now, in effect, they have to start over. Republicans are denying the

American people the justice they deserve—the justice we thought was guaranteed by the Constitution. So instead of silencing the Supreme Court and gridlocking our entire judicial system, Republicans should give the Court the ninth Justice it desperately needs.

Focus has been on the Supreme Court, and it should be, but Republicans are doing the same thing with trial court judges. The Federal judiciary has many districts that have declared judicial emergencies. They don't have enough judges to do their work. Republicans are in a state of—the only thing they know to do very well is to block things. We, the American people, know we need to do something about the judiciary. Republicans should do their job and give Merrick Garland a hearing and a vote.

Mr. President, my friend from South Dakota is here. I would ask the Chair, prior to the Senator being recognized, to tell us what the schedule is for today.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein, with the majority controlling the first half and the Democrats controlling the second half.

The Senator from South Dakota.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment to discuss Congress's efforts to combat the Zika virus. Combating Zika is a public health priority, and it is important that this not be turned into a political issue. The administration and Congress need to work together to combat the virus by funding necessary programs, such as mosquito eradication efforts, before the threat escalates further. Congress has already acted to provide incentives for manufacturers to develop new medicines to prevent or to treat Zika. We have also approved the use of nearly \$600 million to initiate a Zika response effort, including research into vaccines and treatments and improving mosquito control, because the best way to deal with any illness is to stop people from getting sick in the first place. We need to make controlling mosquitos a priority.

I introduced a measure to remove burdensome permitting restrictions on mosquito control efforts so we can immediately free up additional resources to keep the mosquito population in check. A vaccine to prevent the Zika virus isn't likely to be available until next year, at the earliest, which means

our primary weapon in combating Zika right now is controlling mosquitoes so people don't get infected. For that reason, we need to prioritize mosquito control programs and provide immediate regulatory relief.

Aggressive mosquito abatement is the most timely step we can take to keep women and children safe. I am pleased my approach was included in the Cornyn amendment the Senate considered yesterday. I only wish it had prevailed. I am hopeful we can still work with both sides of the aisle to get timely regulatory relief for all impacted industries in the final Zika response package. I believe it is important that if we are going to beat this thing, we do it by eradicating mosquitoes and making it possible for those who are responsible and tasked with that responsibility to be able to do that.

OBAMACARE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, back when the President and Senate Democrats were lobbying for passage of ObamaCare, they made a number of promises. The one thing they promised over and over again was that the President's health care plan would lower costs.

"Bringing down costs of health insurance and making it more affordable is job one for this health care reform." That is a quote that was made by the then-Democratic majority whip on the floor in December of 2009. Families will save on their premiums, President Obama pledged that same month. The Affordable Care Act, Democrats made clear, was the solution to the health insurance challenges facing American families. Well, 6 years down the road it is clear the Affordable Care Act was no solution at all.

The President promised that health care reform would reduce premiums by \$2,500 for the average family. Instead, the average family premium for employer-sponsored health insurance rose by \$4,170 between 2009 and 2015. Forty-five percent of Americans report that their health insurance premium has increased over the past 2 years, and 35 percent report that their copays and deductibles have increased over the same period. The President promised that Americans who liked their insurance plan could keep it. Instead, the President's health care law pushed more than 4.7 million Americans off their health care plans.

Then there is the centerpiece of the President's health care law, the exchanges. The exchanges were supposed to offer accessible, affordable health care to those who had struggled to get insurance, but a lot of Americans are finding out the health care offered on the exchanges is neither affordable nor accessible. Last year countless consumers around the country faced massive rate hikes on their exchange plans. One constituent wrote to tell me that her plan would cost \$1,600 a month for

her, her husband, and their four children—\$1,600 a month. That is more than \$19,000 a year. A new car would be cheaper, and all signs point to consumers being set to face yet huge rate hikes again this year.

Investor's Business Daily recently reported that Oregon's largest insurer in the individual market is seeking an average rate increase of 29.6 percent for its exchange and nonexchange plans for 2017. Meanwhile, over the weekend the Chattanooga Times Free Press reported that Blue Cross exchange customers in Tennessee will face a "major rate increase" that may exceed the 36.3-percent rate increase exchange customers faced this January. The Associated Press recently reported that insurers are seeking rate hikes ranging from 9.4 percent to 37.1 percent on the exchanges in Virginia—a 37.1-percent increase.

Think about that. Let's say you have a family health insurance plan that costs \$10,000 a year. A 37.1-percent increase would add more than \$3,700 to the cost of your plan—\$3,700—for just 1 year. That is a significant amount of money, and you could easily end up facing a similar rate hike the following year.

I could go on and on about ObamaCare. I could read from a steady stream of news stories reporting on ObamaCare's many failures, from huge cost increases to bankrupt co-ops, to decreased access to doctors and hospitals. I could talk about the ways ObamaCare has hiked prescription drug costs or the challenges facing businesses, thanks to the Affordable Care Act's taxes and mandates. I could read stories from my constituents—constituents who have had to wrestle with the inefficient ObamaCare bureaucracy, constituents who lost their health plans as a result of ObamaCare, constituents who can't afford their ObamaCare insurance, but since I don't want to use up all my colleagues' time on the floor as well as my own, I will just say this: Three weeks ago, on April 27, Gallup published the results of a poll on the financial challenges facing American families. The headline of the article was this: "Healthcare Costs Top U.S. Families' Financial Concerns." Let me repeat that. "Healthcare Costs Top U.S. Families' Financial Concerns."

If 6 years on from the passage of the Affordable Care Act health care costs top the list of American families' financial concerns, then the Affordable Care Act has failed, and it is time to repeal it. The Republican-led Senate has already passed legislation to repeal ObamaCare, but we need a President willing to work with us or significant support from Democrats in Congress if we want a repeal to become law. I hope we will see that kind of support in the near future.

The Affordable Care Act has been a disaster from the beginning, and it is time to lift the burdens the law has placed on Americans and replace this

law with health care reform that will actually drive down costs for American families and consumers and increase access to care. That is what we should—and I hope we will—be focused on.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to speak, as Senator THUNE has just spoken, about the disastrous health care results for patients of ObamaCare. You have to go no further than this Sunday's New York Times, the Sunday Review front page. It looks like a red cross tilted on its side with the headline "Sorry, We Don't Take ObamaCare."

The minority leader, HARRY REID, comes to the floor and talks about how wonderful it is. The President says: "Forcefully defend and be proud." Of what? Of "Sorry, we don't take ObamaCare"?

This is the New York Times, a newspaper whose editorial board has supported this health care law. They talk about the pains of the health care act frustrating patients.

It says:

Amy Moses and her circle of self-employed small-business owners were supporters of President Obama and the Affordable Care Act. They bought policies on the newly created New York State exchange.

We have two Democratic Senators from New York. Where are they to respond to what has happened to the people of their home State as a result of this law?

They bought insurance policies on the New York State exchange. What happened? Well, when they called doctors and hospitals in Manhattan to schedule an appointment, they were dismayed to be turned away—not once, it says, but again and again. It says "We don't take ObamaCare" is the umbrella term for the hundreds of plans offered through the President's signature health legislation.

This is the New York Times, about New York. It is a big city, a place where there should be plenty of doctors, plenty of opportunity.

Ms. Moses said:

Anyone who is on these plans knows it's a two-tiered system.

Is that what the President promised the American people—a two-tiered system? She is a successful entrepreneur in a two-tiered system. We are talking about a number of women in New York who are entrepreneurs and are very successful.

Anytime one of us needs a doctor, we send out an alert.

Is that what we are supposed to have? Anytime anybody needs a doctor, send out an alert? If you have a sore throat, send out an alert. That is what they need to do.

The alert they send out among this whole group in New York says: "Does anyone have anyone on an exchange plan that does mammography or colonoscopy [who takes our insurance]?"

She said, "It's really a problem."

I could go on. This is what the President of the United States and the Democrats in this body, who shoved this bill down the throats of the American people, have found that they have created—a plan one in four Americans says has hurt them personally.

That is just one story in the news in one major newspaper, but it says a lot about the health care law in general.

We just heard from Senator THUNE. We know this health care law is a lot more expensive than the President ever promised. People all around the country remember the President saying that it will drive down health care premiums by \$2,500 per family if it becomes law. Remember that? People all across the country remember it. It just hasn't happened. Costs have gone up, copays have gone up, and deductibles have gone up. People have lost their plans, lost their ability to see their doctor, can't go to the hospital they want, and can't get the care they need.

Insurance companies are cutting back on which doctors people can see, and they are cutting back on what drugs people can take. This health care law has made health care worse across the United States of America. We know that some insurance companies are dropping States entirely in terms of a place to do business, so millions of Americans are going to lose their insurance plan again next year.

Do you remember what the President said? "If you like your plan, you can keep your plan." Well, not next year, not last year, not the year before that. Even the Kaiser Family Foundation, which studies these issues, says that there are more than 650 counties in which families will have only one choice for insurance next year.

I pulled up an article from the New York Times. That is not the only place there has been a similar article. This is Monday's paper, May 16, Wall Street Journal: "Health insurers quit rural exchanges." They are abandoning rural areas all across the country—in my home State of Wyoming, but it is also happening everywhere. It is entire States—Alaska, Alabama, Wyoming. There is only one choice where people can buy ObamaCare insurance next year.

If you only have one choice, often you are put in a situation where you can take it or leave it. Not under Barack Obama. Oh, no. You must buy it. You have no choice, other than to pay an expensive penalty. That is what health care looks like now under HARRY REID and the Democrats and Barack Obama and the Senators on the Democratic side of the aisle who voted for this monstrosity. Take it or leave it. But you can't leave it because you must buy it.

What happens when there is no competition? What happens when the health care law adds thousands of pages of expensive mandates and costs continue to go up? Premiums have gone through the roof. These are the

requested premium hikes for ObamaCare plans for next year: We have seen 33 percent requested in Virginia; Oregon, 32 percent; Iowa, 43 percent; New Hampshire, 45 percent for some families. People are finding out that their insurance premiums are now higher than their mortgage payment.

What do the Democrats say about all of this? Someone brought this up to Hillary Clinton at a campaign event in Virginia last week. A woman who owns a small business said: "I have seen our health insurance for my own family go up \$500 a month in just the last two years. We went from 400-something to 900-something [a month]."

What did Hillary Clinton have to say about this? What was her response? She said: "What could possibly have raised your costs . . . that's what I don't understand."

Is she serious? It is ObamaCare that raised her costs. Where has Hillary Clinton been the last 6 years that she doesn't understand it? This was in Virginia. This small business owner—the woman who went to the townhall meeting and asked Hillary Clinton a question—may see her rates go up another 33 percent next year.

It is not just Hillary Clinton who is clueless. HARRY REID, the Democratic leader in the Senate, came to the floor last month and told the world that ObamaCare is "working." Does HARRY REID not understand that millions of American are paying more for their health insurance and their health care than they did before ObamaCare? Many people are paying for insurance, but they can't get care, as we see from the New York Times story. Does Senator REID not understand that people are paying more for coverage and getting less care in return?

Does every Senator on the Democratic side of the aisle who voted for ObamaCare not understand how this outrageous law is hurting America and Americans and the people of this great country?

There was a new poll that came out last month that found that only 44 percent of Americans approve of the health care law but 54 percent disapprove of the law. I remember Senator SCHUMER of New York saying: After we pass it, it will get more popular. Still, 54 percent disapprove. That is the highest disapproval number in the last 2 years. In this poll, almost one in three Americans said that the health care law has had a negative effect on their family—their personal family; not that they know somebody but in their own family. Hillary Clinton doesn't seem to understand that. She said that she wants to expand ObamaCare. She wants more regulations, more restrictions, more of the terrible ideas that have driven up costs for American families.

There was another piece of news last week that shows one more way the health care law is failing. It turns out that the Obama administration has been making illegal payments—pay-

ments found by a judge to be illegal—to big insurance companies to help prop up this health care law. That is what the Federal court ruled last Thursday.

In 2014 the administration asked Congress to appropriate money to pay insurance companies above and beyond the subsidies they already get that the government pays for insurance premiums. It is called a cost-sharing subsidy. Congress—power of the purse—refused to appropriate the money.

Do you know what the administration did? The administration panicked. It knew that without more Washington spending, people would pay even more out of pocket for their health care costs, and that would make ObamaCare even more unpopular than it is today. In the panic, because they knew that if that happened, people would realize how expensive the law really is and the disaster it is turning into, and people would see that all the President's promises about reducing costs were nothing but fairy tales, the panicked Obama administration went ahead and handed over the money anyway without the authority of Congress. The total was about \$7 billion over the last 2 years. That is how much additional taxpayer money the administration has given away so far to hide the fact that the health care law is an expensive failure.

The American people have had enough of this costly and collapsing health care law. They have had enough of losing their insurance, losing their doctors, losing access to the prescription drugs they need, and paying 20 or 30 percent more every year to get less coverage.

The Democrats can come to the floor and pretend that ObamaCare is working. The Democrats, like Hillary Clinton, don't understand what is going on. The American people know exactly what is going on. They want us to repeal ObamaCare and replace it with health care that actually works, that has fewer restrictions, more freedom—freedom for people to get the coverage that works for them and their families, not what President Obama says they have to have because he believes he knows what they need better than they do.

We need fewer mandates that drive up the cost for everyone and more options for patients to see the doctors they want and to get the medicine they need. That is what the American people want, and it is time for Democrats to show that they are listening to the people of America and that they understand, because up to this point, they have not been listening and they do not understand.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Wyoming for his words. Obviously he is an expert on health care. He is somebody who spent his entire life treating patients and

working to improve the health care of others in Wyoming and beyond. His expertise on this issue is particularly important as we debate the real-life ramifications of ObamaCare, the Affordable Care Act—the so-called Affordable Care Act.

I come to the floor today to talk about the broken promise of ObamaCare and the negative impacts this poorly planned law has had on my State of Colorado. In essence, what ObamaCare did was create a pay-to-play scheme—mandates and dictates of a law where you will pay higher premiums to abide by the law.

As ObamaCare continues on a downward trajectory, Americans are the ones who are bearing the brunt of its failures, particularly those who are living in rural America, in rural Colorado.

Month after month, headline after headline, Americans are no longer surprised when they hear of another ObamaCare disaster as they continue to foot the ever-increasing bill. There are fewer choices, less competition, and higher costs.

"If you like your health care plan, you can keep it." Do you remember those famous words? The President assured Americans time and time again not to worry. "If you like your health care plan, you can keep it." He said it countless times. It was echoed by almost every Member in this body who supported ObamaCare.

Coloradans and millions of Americans around the country learned that this promise was far from the truth. In late 2013, roughly 335,000 small-group and individual policies in Colorado were canceled due to the requirements of ObamaCare, 335,000 Coloradans who witnessed through a letter in their mailbox—including a letter I received in my mailbox canceling my insurance because of ObamaCare. Those 335,000 people realized that "if you like your plan, you can keep your plan" was simply not true.

The cancellations in 2013 were just the very beginning. In 2014, a couple months later, the Colorado Division of Insurance canceled another 249,000 plans because these plans didn't meet the requirements of ObamaCare. When we talk about these plans being canceled because they didn't meet the requirements of ObamaCare, some people on the left, those who supported ObamaCare, would argue they must have been bad plans, bad insurance, or bad policies. But that presumes that the government knows what is best for everyone involved, that the government has a better idea of what their insurance ought to be, and that the government should take care of and think for people who chose these plans themselves individually. But 249,000 people, on top of the 335,000 people in January of 2014, had their insurance canceled.

Again, in 2015 the story continued with an additional 190,000 plans on the individual and small group markets being canceled. In total, according to the Congressional Research Service,

over 750,000 health insurance plans in Colorado were canceled between 2013 and 2015. Three-quarters of a million people who were promised that “if you like your health insurance plan, you can keep your plan” had their plans canceled under the broken promise of ObamaCare. That is still not the end of it for Coloradans because Coloradans are still receiving cancellation notices. Within the last 2 months, two of the Nation’s largest insurers, UnitedHealthcare and Humana, announced their intent to exit the individual marketplace. UnitedHealth Group’s CEO cited that the marketplaces were a risky investment and that UnitedHealth could not serve these exchanges on an “effective and sustained basis.” This decision will impact roughly 20,000 more Coloradans, and beneficiaries of these plans can expect cancellation notices in July.

The disappointment and frustration over a canceled plan that your family once enjoyed is made worse by the rising costs of the remaining plans, and that is what many Americans are faced with today. After losing 750,000 of them in Colorado—losing the health insurance plans they were promised they could keep—they looked at the second promise made under ObamaCare—that this will lower the cost of health care. Now they are met with the second broken promise—the broken promise of cost. They were told they would see reduced costs with ObamaCare. Yet the Colorado Division of Insurance found that individual insurance premiums for 2016 on the Western Slope of Colorado rose by an average of 25.8 percent. The Western Slope of Colorado had a nearly 26-percent rate increase. When people think of Colorado, that is often the part of Colorado they think of most. Denver is on the Front Range. The mountains have the ski communities. The rural communities have farming and agriculture. The mining communities and the oil and gas industries are on the Western Slope. These rural areas watched their health insurance premiums increase by 26 percent—premiums that were promised would be going down.

A woman who lives on the Western Slope was recently interviewed by the Denver Post. She said she saw her premium cost alone rise from \$300 per month to \$1,828 per month, or nearly \$22,000 a year in increased costs. She says:

It’s actually like another mortgage payment. I have friends who are uninsured right now because they can’t afford it. Insurance is hard up here.

The Western Slope of Colorado had two promises broken—the promise that if you liked your health care, you could keep it and that this would lower the cost of your health care. They had an increase of nearly 26 percent. If you live on the Western Slope of Colorado, you saw your increase go from a premium of \$300 a month to over \$1,800 per month—a \$22,000 a year increase. This is incredible.

In 2014, a study found that nearly 150,000 Coloradans saw their insurance become 77 percent more expensive. Where is the promise of ObamaCare? Where are the people who supported the Affordable Care Act today defending this law, defending the promise, or explaining how these promises weren’t broken? They are not here because they can’t explain it. They know the promise was broken. They know that 750,000 people had their promises broken. In Colorado alone, there are people facing 26-percent and 77-percent increases. As we approach the new rates for 2017, it appears there will be no limit to the additional costs that Coloradans will have to bear as a result of this poorly conceived partisan law.

Marilyn Tavenner, president and CEO of America’s Health Insurance Plans, or AHIP, served as a key Obama administration health official as Administrator of CMS. She has testified multiple times before committees of the House and Senate and has made warnings that the Affordable Care Act premium increases are coming. She predicted that the increases for open enrollment in 2017 will be higher than ever before. This is coming from a former administration official who helped run ObamaCare and was in the room during the discussions and the crafting of policies of ObamaCare.

In Colorado, insurers submitted their initial premium bids last Friday, May 13. We will soon know the rates that have been approved by the Colorado Department of Insurance in late September or early October, but it looks like Coloradans are in for yet another rude awakening. The people in Colorado have already had their health insurance plans canceled, and more are losing their policies in July of this year and trying to figure out how to make ends meet. If they are in a situation like the one I spoke of before—the example I used before—this person is going to have to figure out over the next year how they are going to basically create a \$22,000 a year payment they didn’t face before.

I was speaking to an executive with an insurance company who said they believe the rates they will be submitting for increases this year to their department of insurance commissioner will be between 60 and 70 percent. That is a 60- and 70-percent insurance rate increase under ObamaCare for the 2017 cycle. Premiums are expected to rise and many parts of the country are going to experience double-digit rate hikes. Plans are getting canceled, plans are getting more expensive, yet the ObamaCare mandates continue.

I believe what we need in this country is greater competition and greater choice. That is what President Obama promised in the marketplace, but data shows that because of unbearable bureaucratic hurdles, competition has actually decreased.

On Sunday, the Wall Street Journal published an article titled “Insurance Options Dwindle in Some Rural Re-

gions.” I live in a very rural part of Colorado, on the Eastern Plains, as opposed to the Western Slope, which we spoke of before. I live in a town of about 3,000 people. The nearest big town is 60 miles away, and that town has 9,000 people. The article in the Wall Street Journal explains how rural areas have experienced the greatest decline in competition and how many rural counties will only have one insurance plan to choose from. I think most people understand that rural areas aren’t exactly the wealthiest areas in the Nation. There are pockets of wealth, absolutely, as there are in most places, but by and large our rural communities represent some of the poorest and least economically driven counties in the country.

A Kaiser Family Foundation study found that over 650 counties across this country will have only 1 insurer on the exchanges to choose from during the open enrollment in 2017. This is a number which is up by 225 counties from 2016. Let me say that again. There are 650 counties across this country that will only have 1 choice when it comes to open enrollment. They will only have one plan to choose from under ObamaCare. This is the plan for competition that the Affordable Care Act was supposed to address. But instead of adding more insurers to the marketplace, it actually resulted in fewer insurers in the marketplace. We will see 225 additional counties down to 1 choice in 2017. These 650 counties are 70 percent rural, and these rural areas are fearful that the dwindling competition will create a monopoly and costs will continue to rise.

The President also insisted that the competition would increase through consumer-run co-ops. Over 80,000 Coloradans felt the impact of this broken promise when Colorado HealthOP was declared to be insolvent by the Colorado insurance commissioner and expeditiously liquidated.

To date, 12 of the 23 co-ops created by ObamaCare have been shut down. That is an additional 80,000 people in Colorado who had their insurance policies canceled because ObamaCare created a system that allowed insurance co-ops and companies to bank on a bailout. They were able to bank on a bailout and use that to create some aura of economic feasibility on their balance sheets. When the government couldn’t provide any bailouts—because the government shouldn’t be in the business of bailouts—the ObamaCare promises were shown for what they truly were—poor policy. Collectively the failed co-ops were loaned over \$1 billion in taxpayer money to help get them off the ground. Now, with these failures, the taxpayers will never get their money paid back and tens of thousands of people lost their insurance.

Today, this Congress has shown a path forward. With each passing disaster of ObamaCare, it continues to become clearer how much of a failure this law is. Americans continue to demand

real health care reform that will increase competition, reduce costs, and expand access to lifesaving care that improves the quality of their lives and, most importantly, will provide predictability and sustainability in the marketplace.

This crisis demands real leadership, and I continue to remain committed to working with my colleagues on free-market solutions that will bring about real change that will actually uphold the promises that were made.

In Colorado, I heard from countless individuals who have been displaced from their plans, and it is time for Congress to stand up as well.

The Denver Post article that I referred to about the broken health care system in Colorado's Western Slope begins with a statement from Terri Newland of Glenwood Springs, CO. This is the headline: "Colorado mountain residents struggle to pay for health insurance." The story starts like this: "The new era of affordable health care bypassed Terri Newland."

Millions of Americans have seen the Affordable Care Act's era of affordable health care bypass them, and this body's responsibility for that law can only be made up by repealing the law and putting in its place a bill that actually increases the quality of care and decreases the cost of care.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNITED STATES-CUBA RELATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, since December of 2014, when the United States and Cuba ended 54 years of diplomatic isolation that had accomplished nothing good for the people of Cuba or the United States, there has been an explosion of engagement between our two countries. The number of U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba has skyrocketed. Talks between both governments resulted in agreements to resume direct airline, ocean ferry, and mail service. There is expanded cooperation in a wide range of bilateral and regional issues. These are encouraging steps, but there is a long road ahead.

For more than half a century, whatever problems there were in Cuba the Cuban Government could blame on the United States because of our embargo. Some Members of the House and Senate have expressed disappointment, and criticized President Obama's opening to Cuba because the restoration of diplomatic relations has not quickly brought about dramatic changes in Cuba's repressive political system and did not reverse 54 years of history in 54 days.

Well, these Members of Congress are either naive or simply prefer to ignore the positive changes that are occurring and choose to ignore or dismiss the views of the overwhelming majority of Cubans and Americans who support the restoration of relations. They continue to defend a discredited policy of isolation that through all those decades, and Republican and Democratic administrations, failed to achieve any of its objectives.

As President Obama said, if you try something for 50 years and it doesn't work, it is time to try something else. In the past 15 months, although the naysayers will not publicly admit it, the Cuban people have a sense of hope about the future that has not existed since the time of the 1959 revolution. I know. I have seen and heard it on my trips there.

It is also important to recognize that the majority of Cubans alive today were born after the revolution. And just as Cuba's population has changed, so the world has changed.

Overwhelmingly, Cuba's younger generation has experienced enough of a paternalistic, Communist dictatorship and economic stagnation to know that is not what they want. It is no surprise that their reaction to President Obama's extraordinary speech in Havana was warmly and enthusiastically received by them, while several top Cuban officials, sensing the inspiring impact of the President's words, felt compelled to criticize our President. I was there for that visit. I saw the reaction of the Cuban people.

The raising of the American flag in Havana last August symbolized the beginning of a new era in U.S.-Cuban relations, but change was happening in Cuba well before then, and it is going to continue at its own pace. Ultimately, the Cuban people—not the United States—will determine that pace and what a post-Castro Cuba will look like.

My wife Marcelle and I stood there at our Embassy as the flag went up, and we heard the cheers of the Cuban people standing just outside the gates of the Embassy.

We can contribute to the process of change in positive ways. One way is through student exchanges. Last month, Vermont students from Burlington, Essex, Shelburne, and Bristol traveled to Cuba to participate in a week of Little League baseball games and cultural exchange. Marcelle and I went to Burlington to see them off. I cannot begin to describe thrill in their faces, the excitement they felt. We gave them an American flag to take with them. The Vermonters didn't speak much Spanish, and the Cubans spoke almost no English, but it didn't really matter. They had translators, and the game of baseball is a language across cultures.

Here is a picture of the Vermonters with the Cuban ball players holding the American flag that we gave them, the Cuban flag, and a Vermont flag. This

was taken in Cuba. I love to take photographs. I wish I had been there to take that one. We know a picture is worth a thousand words. They show how just a few days of competing on a baseball diamond can help bridge a half-century divide between two countries and cultures. Anybody who has children—or grandchildren—who play baseball or Little League ball recognizes these smiles. We know what it means. They don't speak the same language, but they speak one language, which is the game of baseball.

The Vermonters voiced high praise for the Cuban players who won all the games, except the all-star game at the end when they shared players and were evenly matched.

But winning isn't everything. As the Vermont players recounted after returning home, it was not only a fun week of baseball, but one of the most rewarding parts of the trip was the time spent after the game getting to know the Cuban players, getting to know their families, and learning about life in Cuba.

This is actually the second baseball exchange involving Vermont and Cuban Little Leaguers, the first being in 2008 when a group from Vermont and New Hampshire played a series of games on the outskirts of Havana. One of those players said the team went to Cuba just to have fun: "We are not here to win. If they hear about us, maybe other teams will want to do this or maybe even get a Cuban team to the United States to play."

Lisa Brighenti in my office took this photograph. I think it says it all. You can't see their faces, but we know one is Cuban and one is American. These are kids playing a Little League game. And think of what this picture says to all of us.

Children don't care about the politics. They don't even care about the differences in language. They just care about the things that unite them.

I remember speaking with President Obama shortly after he became President and saying we had to change our policy toward Cuba. I told him there would be a memo saying he should hold tight, the Castros will be gone any day. I pointed out that same memo was sent to President Eisenhower and President Kennedy and President Johnson and President Nixon, and he said: I get your point.

Nothing changed during more than half a century when we tried to isolate Cuba. Now I think change will come.

Our governments remain far apart on key issues. A few Members of Congress continue to stubbornly obstruct efforts to end the embargo, but as every poll has shown in this country the American people—like these young Vermont athletes—are showing us a way forward by breaking down barriers on their own.

I am so proud of these young Vermonters. They know. They know what the future looks like. As for the rest of us, let's step toward the future with them.