

On Friday, I will be proudly signing the D.C. Bully Busters pledge, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me so that we can let everyone know at every level that bullying is never acceptable.

COMMONSENSE VA REFORM

(Mr. BERGMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a cosponsor of H.R. 1259, the VA Accountability First Act.

This important piece of legislation targets vulnerabilities within the VA employment structure that prevent bad actors from being fired or demoted. This commonsense reform gives the Secretary of the VA the flexibility to dismiss or demote employees who are guilty of on-the-job inebriation, drug diversion, and sexual assault, just to name a few. Our veterans deserve quality care. They have earned quality care.

As chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, it is my highest priority in making sure that our Department of Veterans Affairs is working for the men and women who have worn the cloth of our Nation and made the sacrifices that keep us free: our veterans.

This bill moves the needle in the right direction, and I commend Chairman ROE for introducing it.

HEALTHCARE REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. FERGUSON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying that, for the last 25 years, I practiced dentistry in Georgia's Third District and I experienced a healthcare system that was broken and in desperate need of repair to reduce costs and increase access to care.

After the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, I saw my patients, my friends, my neighbors forced away from doctors who had treated them for their entire lives. Instead of decreasing costs, patients saw their costs skyrocket and their access to care limited.

As a medical practitioner, I want what is best for my patients. Those are the people that I am fighting for: my neighbors and constituents who saw their premiums skyrocket, their quality and access to care limited or determined by a government bureaucrat. I committed to them that I would repeal ObamaCare and undo the damage that it has done to our healthcare system.

The legislation we are currently considering in the House, the American Health Care Act, is just the beginning of keeping that promise.

This is not a choice between a broken healthcare system that existed before

ObamaCare. It is a new direction that reflects an understanding of what works and what does not work. The legislation will enact many reforms that directly impact Americans by lowering costs and improving access to care.

Tonight, my colleagues and I are going to share with you in great detail what that legislation does. We have all been very open in our opposition to the Affordable Care Act, but it is also important that we share with our constituents what we stand for and what we are working to do to reform this broken system.

We stand for patient-centered health care that meets the needs of our constituents in an affordable way. We stand for market-driven healthcare solutions and an industry that prioritizes personal freedom over government mandates. We stand for the biggest entitlement reform in a generation to ensure that we protect our most vulnerable populations.

This is just a short list of the goals we are working towards, and I am excited to be joined by a number of my colleagues tonight to help me explain more to the American people what is happening with our healthcare system.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARRINGTON). He served in the George W. Bush administration. He has worked with the FDIC, and he has been a public servant in Lubbock, Texas, at Texas Tech University. He serves on the House Agriculture Committee, the Budget Committee, and the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Mr. Speaker, the facts are indisputable: President Obama's attempt to plan our healthcare economy from Washington, D.C., has failed.

I have spent nearly 2 years crisscrossing 29 counties in west Texas, and I can report from the many stories from my constituents that no single law or policy has been more reviled, more destructive, or more intrusive than ObamaCare. It is absolutely crushing our small businesses and Main Street Americans everywhere.

The American Health Care Act repeals ObamaCare and is a step in the right direction to freeing the American people from the scourge of government-controlled health care.

For the first time since the passage of ObamaCare, according to the Congressional Budget Office's report recently, the American Health Care Act will lower premiums over time by 10 percent, a far cry from the skyrocketing premiums we have seen over the last several years since the passage of the Affordable Care Act.

The report goes on to say that the American Health Care Act will reduce the deficit by \$337 billion and make the biggest entitlement reform in generations, saving taxpayers well over \$800 billion.

This bill strikes at the heart of ObamaCare by repealing its mandates, eliminating its taxes, and gutting its regulations.

Make no mistake, this legislation is not perfect. I will continue to fight for more conservative and more fiscally responsible policy outcomes like work requirements for able-bodied adults. But when the dust settles and the debate is over, we cannot allow perfect policy aspirations to be the enemy of good, conservative results. The alternative, Mr. Speaker, is simply unacceptable.

□ 2015

My constituents sent me to Washington to tackle the tough issues and solve the big problems. Well, we have got one, and it is called ObamaCare. I committed a long time ago that if I ever had the chance, I would repeal ObamaCare, and I plan on keeping my promise, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Texas touched on some very important issues. One that he talked about was the process here, that this is just the beginning of a long journey that we must take to rebuild our American healthcare system.

This has been an open legislative process. More than 8 months ago, even before I was a Member of this great House, the Republican caucus here released A Better Way agenda, which detailed a consensus vision for patient-centered healthcare reform. Our bill, the American Health Care Act, is built on that framework.

These ideas are not new. They are not unvetted. They are a product of many conversations, debates, and work. Unlike the drafting of ObamaCare, we want our constituents to know what is in this legislation before we pass it. That is why every American can go to readthebill.gov and look at this legislation for themselves. In fact, I encourage anyone who hasn't taken time to look at this legislation yet to go to readthebill.gov and read more about the American Health Care Act.

At no point in this process have I felt closed out of it. As a matter of fact, as a freshman, I can tell you that I have had my voice heard, I have been asked for input, and I have seen many of the ideas that I have spoken about be included in this bill.

This bill has not been crafted behind closed doors. It has not been kept in the shadows. As a matter of fact, it has been just the opposite. As a freshman Member sitting in conference, leadership has been very straightforward about the intentions of the bill, the basic framework of the bill, and I am excited to see that, as this process has gone through regular order, we have seen many amendments added to it, and we are continuing that process.

Regular order means that we have done something very unique here. We haven't just taken a bill and passed it and then get to read what is in it. We have taken a bill, and we have taken it through the committee process. Our colleagues on the Committee on Energy and Commerce and Committee on

Ways and Means have worked through some many long nights debating amendments in an open process.

Tomorrow the House Committee on the Budget will take up this business. I am a member on that committee, and I am looking forward to the process of going through the debate tomorrow. I am sure that it will be long, and I am sure many amendments will be debated; but I am excited about the opportunity that we have to move a piece of legislation forward, make it better, make it more conservative, but, most importantly, make sure that Americans have great health care, access to that health care at an affordable price.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BACON).

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the American Health Care Act.

ObamaCare has failed, and we need to replace it. It has made health care inaccessible for many of the Americans it was created to help. Our premiums have skyrocketed, small business growth has been stunted as it can't expand due to health care regulations, and employees have seen their hours cut. Individuals are forced to purchase healthcare coverage they do not want.

Over the past 2 years, I have met with many Nebraskans in my district. I keep hearing about the broken promises of ObamaCare and the tight stranglehold this law has created for the American people. I have heard from a young mother who had to pay for the whole bill of the delivery of her child. The ACA plan she was on had a \$12,000 deductible, and that plan didn't help her one cent.

Another citizen from Omaha, Jeanine, was happy with her healthcare insurance for decades. Five years ago, she was paying \$323 a month and was satisfied with the coverage she had. Four years ago, she was told by her insurance company that she would have to pay more because she would need additional coverage, like maternity coverage, even though she was past that stage in her life. Two years ago, that insurance plan of Jeanine's jumped to \$690 a month—double.

However, her health insurance company had another policy under ACA which she could switch to. She did so for \$150 a month with a \$550 credit. At least, she had that plan until her insurance company dropped that ACA policy and sent Jeanine searching for another policy. Now Jeanine is on an ACA policy that covers her primary doctor but not her dentist or her pharmacy. All Jeanine wants is a healthcare plan that fits her needs. She does not want the Federal Government telling her what coverage she must purchase.

Imagine for just a second that you have been happy for decades with a product you use, and one day the government comes in and tells you that you don't know what is best for you. They force you to pay more, and in return you get something that doesn't work. ACA is like the government tell-

ing you that you need to buy an expensive, fast, shiny sports car with all the bells and whistles, when all you wanted was a less expensive economy car to get you around town. But later you find out that that fancy sports car is actually a lemon.

That is exactly what happened to Jeanine and countless other Americans when ObamaCare forced them to coverage they did not want or need. This is more than a failed system. It is wrong to the core, and this is what the American Health Care Act is designed to fix.

The American Health Care Act is a step in the right direction, and we are fulfilling our promises to repair the problems that ACA has left us. This legislation repeals major flaws of ObamaCare, such as employer and individual mandates, letting individuals choose what coverage is best for them. Under this bill, health savings accounts will be expanded and will give tax credits for those who buy their own insurance to give them parity with those who get employer-provided coverage tax free. These are things that I campaigned on and promised to fight for, and they are in the bill.

The bill also gives States more control over their healthcare policies, allowing for patient-centered health care and getting the Federal bureaucrats out of the discussion. The American Health Care Act, instead, allows for individuals to choose the health insurance plans based on their needs and budget, allowing for Americans to have greater access and to find a health plan that is right for them. The CBO shows that it is going to lower those premiums by 10 percent. Now, Nebraska had a 51 percent increase last year, Mr. Speaker. This plan is going to lower premiums by 10 percent.

The American Health Care Act will reduce the deficit and cut taxes. According to Monday's CBO score, this bill will reduce the Federal deficit by \$337 billion and lower taxes by \$883 billion. That is good for America.

Finally, the American Health Care Act does this and yet preserves affordable insurance for those with pre-existing conditions and maintains a safety net for those who cannot pay premiums. These are things that I also promised to fight for, and they are in the bill.

I look forward to working with my fellow House Members on both sides of the aisle to deliver the best law for the American people. We are going to be debating this bill for the next few weeks, and we are going to make it better.

I am proud that this Congress and the Republican leadership have made a commitment to passing this legislation in an open and transparent process. This is a good first step toward fixing the mess of the ACA.

Before we vote on this, I encourage my colleagues and the American people to carefully read the bill so they can find out what is in it. Unlike

ObamaCare, we don't have to pass this to find out what is in it. We know now.

This is a great step forward, a patient-centered, doctor-supported healthcare system that gives power back to the States and gets the bureaucrat out of our healthcare decisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this.

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BACON) for his remarks.

He touched on something that is very important, and that is the driving down of cost and how this is accomplished. Truly, when the patient is in control of their health care, they are also in control of the cost. We are fighting for consumer choice in a patient-driven healthcare system. We understand, and I certainly understand, that patients and doctors need to be at the center of the healthcare conversation, not bureaucrats and not insurance clerks.

Our plan includes provisions to expand choice and give consumers more control over their healthcare dollars. The American Health Care Act significantly increases the amount individuals and families can contribute to their personal health savings accounts each year, allowing them to save more to pay for future healthcare expenses and the flexibility to use their healthcare dollars as they choose.

It also allows them to spend those healthcare dollars where they think that it will best benefit their families. It allows them to have the most intimate conversations with their healthcare providers and make sure that they are making the right decisions and using their dollars wisely. If the first question always is "does my insurance company pay for it?" you are always going to get the most expensive answer. However, if the patient has contributed to this process, the patient then will be able to make some informed decisions through good conversations with their doctors, and they can better manage their own health care.

We are fighting for a system that puts patients first and allows Georgians in the Third District and all across this Nation to make their own healthcare decisions. That starts with a conversation between the doctor and the patient.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RUTHERFORD). He is a former three-term sheriff from Florida, representing the greater Jacksonville area.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise to speak of fairness, to speak of equity, to speak of parity for America's hardworking taxpayers. I want to talk about bringing parity between Americans who get their insurance coverage through their employer and those who are forced to purchase theirs on the individual market.

Currently, over 150 million Americans who have employer-sponsored health insurance enjoy a tax benefit to

purchase that health insurance. However, Americans who purchase their insurance in the individual marketplace, like farmers, small-business owners, plumbers, and mechanics, do not have a similar kind of benefit. Mr. Speaker, simply put, this is just unfair.

However, the American Health Care Plan helps fix this inequity by offering a portable tax credit to help these Americans purchase the health insurance they choose. These credits are also age-adjusted so older Americans who have higher healthcare costs will also see a larger credit to assist them in purchasing that insurance.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, many individuals and families in Florida's Fourth Congressional District will benefit from this reform and for the first time will be on a more level playing field in purchasing their health insurance. We are fighting for basic fairness. No American, no small-business man or woman, no farmer, plumber, or mechanic should be disadvantaged because of where they work or where they are forced to purchase their insurance.

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Florida touched on something that is very important, and that is fairness in the marketplace. I can tell you, as a small-business owner, I did not receive the same favorable tax treatment as the major corporations did under the Affordable Care Act. Once this bill took effect, I had to move into the individual market. I had to begin buying health insurance with post-tax dollars, and I was unable to afford the coverage not only for my family, but for the people that I had the pleasure of working with every single day in my business.

What Mr. RUTHERFORD talked about is leveling the playing field, and that is something that we need to do. It will increase innovation. It increases jobs. It increases success. It is so frustrating for Americans as they begin to build their small businesses and they begin to grow, and every single time that they take a step forward, the government takes more and more out of their pocket. Now we have a healthcare system that continues to rob them of their success.

Make no mistake; the healthcare system that we had prior to the Affordable Care Act was certainly not successful and not headed in the right way, but we have made it worse with this. What we have done is we have not only disenfranchised many small businesses and people who are growing their businesses and finding success, but we have also, quite candidly, done a poor job of maintaining our safety net. What we are fighting for is to increase affordable health care for all Americans, and this has meant listening to a lot of the feedback from our families and our constituents back home.

What we need to recognize is that, under our plan, dependents can continue to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26 and they are fully on

their feet, if that is the right thing for their families to do. Americans told us that they like this flexibility, and we have listened to them.

Our plan will also ensure that those who have preexisting conditions can't be charged more for the health coverage they need. It also includes incentives, not mandates, to encourage Americans to have continuous coverage. This is good for the marketplace, and it will keep costs down for all Americans. Our portable tax credits will also increase access to coverage by assisting lower income individuals to purchase the health insurance that they need.

What is more, the American Health Care Act includes a Patient and State Stability Fund to help States expand the number of vulnerable patients who have access to health care. We know that States know how to best meet the unique needs of their citizens, and this is going to give them the flexibility to do that. Therefore, as these funds are flexible, they allow things like cutting out-of-pocket expenses for patients, promoting access to preventive services, or increasing available options in the marketplace—all things that are needed.

□ 2030

These reforms will help drive down costs and increase access to care. This is good news for patients who are worried about affordable coverage. Unlike ObamaCare, though, it means that their coverage provides them with meaningful access to care.

It does you no good to have an insurance plan that you cannot afford to use. Time and time again, I have patients, I have small-business owners, I have constituents from all over Georgia's Third District that come to me and say: Just because I have this new insurance plan doesn't mean that my family is getting better care.

One such example was a gentleman that came into my district office just this past week. Three years ago, his health insurance for his family with four children was about \$900, and he had a \$3,000 family deductible. Last year, his premium had risen to \$1,700 a month. And this year, he laid in front of me on my desk in the district office a bill for his health insurance that was \$2,400 a month, and a \$7,000 deductible. He is a small-business owner with nine employees. It is absolutely crushing his family expenses, and that is not fair.

What we have done is we have created an environment where we have tried unsuccessfully to expand access; and in doing so, we have risen costs on men and women across this Nation that are trying to do their best to move into the middle class. We have seen it destroy family finances. We have seen it create a situation where many families now pay more for their health insurance than they do for their own homes.

Mr. Speaker, in my case, that is the exact same thing. My insurance pay-

ment is more than my house payment, and that simply doesn't seem right.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Ms. TENNEY). She has proven to be a great Member of Congress. I have enjoyed working with her thoroughly. Ms. TENNEY has some very revealing remarks going forward.

Ms. TENNEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. FERGUSON), my esteemed colleague.

I rise today to recognize the New Yorkers who have been hit especially hard by the policies of the previous administration and ObamaCare's so-called reforms to our healthcare system. Patients have been hurt, doctors have been burdened, and families and taxpayers are being crushed by this terrible law, and its thousands of pages of onerous regulations.

Our most vulnerable citizens—seniors, the hardworking middle class, and veterans—are in worse shape now in upstate New York than they were before. In New York State and across the 22nd District, patients are being denied high-quality care that they deserve and need.

With higher costs, less accessible and affordable care, and mountains of red tape, this law has proven to be everything but a Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Now, some deductibles are higher than a house payment, and premiums across the Nation have increased on average by 25 percent. Our families didn't sign up for this.

Patients have had their plans canceled and their doctors are deemed out of network. They have fewer and worse choices than before. All the while, costs have skyrocketed with premiums and deductibles jumping by double digits and triple digits in some cases.

This failed law has hurt our economy, small-business owners, and family farms while driving hundreds of thousands of jobs out of our communities. Small businesses are being crushed by ObamaCare and have either stopped hiring or dropped insurance coverage for their employees. The CBO estimated that ObamaCare will result in the loss of at least 2 million jobs. In fact, the number one complaint of small-business owners in my district throughout the last 6 years has been ObamaCare, and 70 percent of the new jobs are created by the small businesses in our community.

One small-business owner, in fact, told me that she had to lay off nearly a dozen employees just to keep up with the cost of ObamaCare. Just think of looking at 12 families and saying: You have now lost the primary caregiver in your family just to keep up with ObamaCare mandates.

Another family that I met with told me they had their insurance lost after being canceled three times, and now their options are either limited or unaffordable.

Another independent, self-insured man with three children told me that he had an insurance plan, but he had no

health care, with a \$12,000 annual deductible.

This is unfair and it is unsustainable for small-business owners, particularly those in the independent market.

Hardworking middle class families in New York are being burdened with nearly the highest taxes in the Nation. New York is one of only four States that passes the State 50 percent share Medicaid burden onto the local taxpayers. Twenty-five percent of the State's obligation to cover Medicaid costs are forced onto struggling local governments already suffocating under unfunded mandates from the State. This has caused property and sales taxes to increase year after year, crushing the pocketbooks of even the most vulnerable taxpayers.

In New York State, local taxpayers throughout our 63 counties will be forced to pay over \$7.5 billion annually in this local share to support New York's Medicaid program. New York's Medicaid program is the largest in the Nation. In fiscal year 2018, the cost will be over \$65 billion—over 42 percent of New York's \$152 billion proposed State budget. That is nearly the cost of the entire State of Florida's State budget.

Already, taxpayers in upstate and central New York are burdened with some of the highest combined property and sales tax in the country. Every penny that goes for this failing scheme is a penny less for our schools, our roads, care for our seniors, care for people with special needs, and actually the truly needy in our communities.

There is a better way that won't leave anyone behind. It is vitally important that we begin to repeal ObamaCare so we can provide relief for people across the country and the State.

I am currently reviewing the American Health Care Act, a reform initiative proposed to alleviate the pressures ObamaCare has put on patients, providers, and taxpayers. The proposals in the American Health Care Act will lower premiums by 10 percent, reduce taxes by \$883 billion, and reduce the Federal deficit dollars by \$337 billion. All are a significant step in the right direction.

However, I will continue to listen to constituents in the 22nd District as the House carefully considers this legislation before we vote on it and any future bills to improve and restore our healthcare system for all.

Current and future taxpayers must not be saddled with further debt and taxes to pay for lower quality and less access to care. Any new initiative must enshrine the freedom to choose a plan tailored to each person and each family. Any new initiative must include a competitive marketplace which provides better and broader options for families across all economic sectors. Any new initiative must protect seniors and the truly needy in our society, because we do have an obligation and a desire to help them.

But the status quo is unacceptable. ObamaCare is inefficient, ineffective,

and tramples our precious liberties. We, as their duly elected representatives, should do all in our power to patient-centered, cost-conscious, high-quality system of health care in this country. I will continue to fight for everyone in our communities.

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from New York for her very candid remarks. As you can see, she touched on many important issues—the unfairness of the system that we have now, but also the importance of protecting our Medicaid safety net.

What we have seen under the Affordable Care Act is that we have seen our safety nets eroded. We are diverting resources away from the people that need them the most—the poor, the elderly, the blind, the disabled, children, and pregnant women—and we are pushing those resources to able-bodied men and women who do have the ability to work.

It is important to recognize that our legislation is probably the largest entitlement reform program in a generation. Our legislation puts Medicaid back on a budget for the first time in history. It provides enhanced flexibility to the States to allow them to design effective and financially sound programs to meet their population's unique needs.

Our plan also ensures that Medicaid prioritizes care for the most vulnerable, who it was originally intended for. We must do this because there are so many Americans, unfortunately, that have to depend on this safety net for their health care.

I understand this. In my hometown, in my dental practice, I treated patients who relied on Medicaid for their healthcare coverage. It was an honor to take care of them and to have very real discussions about their healthcare needs. I understand this vulnerable population because they were a vital part of my practice, and it was truly my pleasure to take care of them. I understand the unique circumstances that cause many of these individuals to be on Medicaid and to need this valuable safety net.

But we have to have an honest conversation about that. We have to be able to provide that safety net. And as we put more and more able-bodied men and women without children on that safety net, it is diverting resources away from those that need it the most. That is not right and that is not the American way. We are fighting to protect and strengthen this Nation's healthcare safety net.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MARSHALL). Dr. Marshall knows firsthand about health care. He was a practicing OB/GYN, a board chairman of a hospital, and he has served our Nation in the United States Army.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with people like my colleague, Dr. DREW FERGUSON, from Georgia.

I am so proud to stand tonight with the President of the United States. I know that tonight Mr. Trump is speaking loudly on behalf of our healthcare bill. Mr. Trump is ready to take the fight on with us who feel like we need to move this health care forward.

I am not sure how many of you grew up without power steering in your vehicles, but if you know anything about the lack of power steering—and I think back to the tractors I drove growing up, and that tractor, you could not turn that wheel until you started the tractor moving—or if you had a Ford truck or a Dodge truck or a Chevy truck and it didn't have power steering, you couldn't turn that truck until it started moving.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to get this bill moving. We have to move health care forward. I am so tired of the rhetoric of repeal and replace. I am telling you, my constituents sent me here to fix health care. Forget the political rhetoric. I am ready to fix health care. I am ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with Republicans, with Democrats, with people down the aisle, across the aisle, and with our President to get this healthcare bill passed.

Unfortunately, ObamaCare has failed. When this first came about, I was so excited. I was hoping that this would be a healthcare bill that would work. But, unfortunately, it is true that this healthcare bill is dying very quickly.

One-third of counties across this country no longer have a provider to take care of the exchange. My own State of Kansas is down to one provider. Today, even more insurance companies are bailing. This bill is dying. Doing nothing is simply not an option, Mr. Speaker.

□ 2045

As I visited with thousands of patients over the last several years and thousands of my constituents, they said there are several things that they thought were important that we save from this healthcare bill, the Affordable Care Act, and I think we have done just that:

Number one, we have protected the preexisting issue conditions;

Number two, we are letting children stay on their parents' health insurance until age 26;

Number three, we are ensuring that women are not charged more for health insurance just because they are a woman; and

Number four, we protected the doughnut hole and kept it closed for Medicare.

So I think we have saved the best things of the Affordable Care Act.

So what have we removed? Mr. Speaker, we removed almost \$1 trillion of taxes. This is the most significant entitlement reform in our generation, the most significant entitlement reform since the 1960s started Medicaid.

What can we expect out of this bill?

We expect premiums to decrease by 10 percent.

We expect to start reprioritizing Medicaid moneys. I want to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that we prioritize Medicaid moneys for those who need it the most: those with disabilities, children, and the elderly. And I want to make sure these people are at the front of the Medicaid line rather than at the end of the line.

This country cannot afford to give Medicaid to able-bodied Americans. We need to prioritize the dollars that we have for those that need it the most.

Mr. Speaker, we spent \$580 billion last year on Medicaid. We are on our way to spending \$1 trillion on Medicaid if we don't do something soon. This country cannot afford to spend \$1 trillion on Medicaid.

Mr. Speaker, these are only the first steps of bending the cost curve downward for health care. We have to do more than just this bill. There are going to be more steps.

I have complete faith in Dr. Tom Price, our new HHS Secretary, that he will be deregulating health care, which is the most regulated business in the country right now. Give Dr. Price 60, 90 days to deregulate medicine and start encouraging competition, and we will start bending this cost curve downward.

We need to empower free markets. We need to empower States to have more local control. We are expanding healthcare savings accounts, but there are many more things we need to do. This is just the start of healthcare reform.

This is the first chapter of a new book on healthcare reform. There are many more chapters to go. I cannot wait to improve health care, to improve quality and start driving the cost curve downward.

Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for allowing me the time to stand shoulder to shoulder with our President, as well as with Dr. DREW FERGUSON, who is representing the State of Georgia so proudly. I am so proud to be called his freshman colleague.

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Dr. MARSHALL for his strong remarks and pointing out and highlighting several important things.

You know, one of the biggest things that we are fighting for as part of repealing ObamaCare is that we are fighting for our personal freedom. Right now, Americans have the "choice" of purchasing a government-mandated, one-size-fits-all product or paying a government-mandated penalty. In almost a third of all U.S. counties, and many in my home State of Georgia, consumers don't even have the choice between insurances to purchase. This is not a choice.

With the passage of the American Health Care Act, no longer will the Federal Government mandate that Americans purchase a product that they don't want, because we believe that individuals should have the freedom to make their own choices. We understand the unique dignity of every

human being. This dignity calls for self-determination and personal freedom, and we are fighting for that freedom. It is important.

I want to thank all of my colleagues who have joined me tonight to share with our constituents more about what we are fighting for.

First off, our legislation promotes personal freedom by eliminating the individual and employer mandates. Purchasing decisions should be left up to the consumer, not the Federal Government. Under our plan, no American is mandated to purchase a product that he or she does not want and cannot afford.

As I have shared, I have personal experience with how important the conversation between the patient and their doctor is. By almost doubling the cap on how much individuals can contribute to their personal health savings accounts each year and expanding where those dollars can be used, our plan puts patients back at the center of the conversation with their doctor, and they remove all of the government bureaucrats from the middle of that conversation.

Health care is personal. It should belong to the patient and their healthcare provider—and no one else. That is where the most important decisions are made.

We are also working to strengthen our safety net to ensure that our vulnerable populations have continued access to health care. Our plan returns power to the States with the biggest entitlement reform in a generation. Our legislation also protects Americans with preexisting conditions, ensuring that no one is unable to purchase insurance because of an illness.

ObamaCare is a complex tangle of regulations and Federal overreach. With every day that passes, Americans and businesses feel the growing weight of a healthcare system that is failing. But it is also irresponsible to return to a broken healthcare system that brought us ObamaCare.

Tomorrow, we will take the next step in the open legislative process as my colleagues and I on the Budget Committee do our part to send the American Health Care Act to the floor of the House for a vote. I am excited to take this step, but I want to be clear that this is only one part of repeal and reform. We are doing all that we can, and we are going to continue to push for conservative solutions with this bill. But it is not the final vote that we will take. There are many steps to go.

While it will take time and patience, I made a promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act and improve our healthcare system for all Americans. I am committed to this difficult road of building this healthcare system that puts patients first. The American people deserve the hard work and political will it will take to do this the right way.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to have been joined by my colleagues tonight

and glad to hear their comments, and I know that you have been as well. I want to point out that my colleagues have done an outstanding job tonight, and I believe that they have made some very, very salient points, and articulated reasons why we must step forward and do all that we can to reform our American healthcare system.

We have to control the cost. We have to do the things necessary to put patients back in control. And, Mr. Speaker, I have confidence that this body, along with our President and our colleagues in the Senate, can do that.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

ROAD TRIP CAMARADERIE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ARRINGTON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. O'ROURKE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Mr. Speaker, it is great to be here tonight. I just traveled with my good friend, close colleague, and fellow Texan—and your fellow Texan—WILL HURD, who started with me in San Antonio, Texas, yesterday at 7 a.m., San Antonio time, where we, because of the inclement weather on the East Coast and because of his canceled flight and the possibility that mine might also be canceled, decided to rent a car in San Antonio and drive it here to Washington, D.C., in time for votes this evening that started at 6:30 eastern standard time.

That road trip in a Chevy Impala, rented in San Antonio, took us from San Antonio to Austin, to San Marcos, to Dallas, to Waco, to Texarkana, and then into Little Rock in Arkansas, over into Tennessee—cities including Memphis, Nashville, and Johnson City—and then through Virginia, 36 hours total, 31 of them either driving or at a pit stop fueling up on gas or grabbing a sandwich.

Mr. Speaker, there were really two reasons to do this. One was to make sure that we could get to work and not allow the weather delays or flight cancellations to stop us from doing the jobs that we were elected to do on behalf of the people that we represent, but the other reason was for a Democrat and a Republican to get together, get to know each other, understand the issues before this Congress from each other's perspective, and see if we couldn't find some common ground.

In addition, because each of us so deeply believes in transparency and accountability, we allowed the people that we represent to join us on that trip. We live-streamed the entire journey on Facebook Live, with thousands of people from all over this country submitting their questions, their comments, their suggestions, their advice, their guidance, including where to get the best doughnut at midnight in Memphis, Tennessee—which turns out to be Gibson's Donuts—where Mr. HURD from Texas and I had a chance to meet some