

to country. It was on a blind date with a fellow sailor that he met the woman he said he would marry. A year later, they married, and for over six decades Edward and his wife lived as a loving couple and raised three daughters, including my constituent, Elizabeth Donaldson.

Mr. Plath passed away in 2010, just a couple months after his wife. But on May 17 of this year, he was buried at sea with full military honors off the coast where he served in New Jersey.

I am grateful for Mr. Plath's service to our Nation, and I am proud our team in Bucks County could assist his daughter in honoring his final wish.

Mr. Speaker, we owe a debt of gratitude to Edward Plath and to all those who serve and continue to serve, and we must always be ready to support them in any way we can, consistent with the motto of the U.S. Coast Guard.

DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important when we have an opportunity to discuss issues in a more deliberative manner to rise to the floor to remind Americans, who every day get up and work and provide the engine to this economy, of the destructive behavior that is about to begin in the United States Congress.

The Affordable Care Act, ObamaCare, took 3 years-plus to engage with every health professional, Americans across the Nation, tens upon tens upon tens of hearings, and individual engagement with people who were sick and families who had lost loved ones because of lack of insurance.

I remember hearing from parents whose children had died because they had no insurance, one mother of a young professional lawyer who had, unfortunately, steered toward drugs but had gotten himself rehabilitated but had developed hepatitis. Because he had no insurance, he wound up dying in the emergency room. There were endless stories like that.

But the Affordable Care Act came in and provided dollars for preexisting conditions. It set a table of essentials that no health insurance could deny you the right to be covered, whether you were pregnant, whether or not you had a preexisting condition. They couldn't deny you hospital coverage.

I don't know if Americans are realizing or our colleagues know that in days past, before the Affordable Care Act, you could be sold an insurance boondoggle that, when you got to the emergency room or the hospital and had to be admitted, they would say you have no coverage. That is the life-saving aspect of the Affordable Care Act.

I don't want anyone to be disabused of the fact that, after the House passed

this heinous, terrible, dangerous, devastating bill, it would go away. The Senate now is going to pick up the same TrumpCare bill that will provide higher costs with less coverage; that will include 23 million people losing their coverage; and as well, that will gut the priorities and the protections for preexisting conditions. If you have asthma, if you are pregnant, you won't be covered. And then, of course, there is a crushing age tax where those who are 50 and older may be paying \$12,000 or more for their coverage in healthcare; and as well, it steals from Medicare and jeopardizes the Medicare trust fund.

Let it be very clear: that is the same pathway of the Senate bill, which is then going to come back to the House. The Republicans continue to undermine the very needs of the American people.

Now, let me explain why insurance companies are closing in various States like Ohio.

It is not ObamaCare. It is the Republicans refuse to come together with Democrats and fix it. It is the devastating, destructive executive order from the administration that refuses to pay subsidies. The subsidies allowed working and middle class Americans to have insurance. And the insurance industry said, it is too unstable a market—not because of Americans, not because of people who are buying insurance, but because, directly from the White House, they have undermined it by stopping the payment of subsidies between the White House and the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

What kind of mercy is that? Where is the kindness and the love and the honoring of the pact we make with the American people that we will stand as their protectors? Where is the basis for how we fought so hard under President Obama and finally got what had not been secured in a century: health insurance for Americans?

Yet we also face a devastating, unstable government. The firing of Director Comey, the testimony under oath that says, by Director Comey, that he felt directed to end the Flynn investigation. I know that doesn't put food on the plates of Americans or their children, but it is the integrity of government.

Where are the investigations in this House? Where are the fact-finding investigations in this House?

The rumor that is now proliferating that a distinguished professional like Mr. Mueller, a former Director of the FBI who served Republican and Democratic Presidents, there is a rumor that the special counsel will be fired.

We are always told in our neck of the woods in Texas that where there is smoke, there is fire. Mr. President, are you going to begin Watergate all over again? The Saturday Night Massacre?

This House needs to begin its investigation now, and this is a need to begin to move on directing the Judici-

ary Committee to begin an investigation of the facts. It warrants it because we have to clear the air before we can sit down at the table and do the work that needs to be done.

In the midst of all of this, a destructive bill is being prepared in the Senate that is going to kill the healthcare of all Americans. It is time for all of us to wake up and take our government back.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to address their remarks to the Chair.

□ 1045

PASS VETERANS AFFAIRS ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. Mr. Speaker, today we have an opportunity to send to the President's desk legislation bringing unprecedented accountability to the VA and badly needed protections for whistleblowers who expose wrongdoing.

Mr. Speaker, as someone who has worked with whistleblowers to shed light on negligence, abuse, and even criminal activity within the Central Alabama VA, I can tell you that this reform legislation is long overdue. When it comes to the VA scandal that erupted a few years ago, most Americans probably remember Phoenix, Arizona, and the horrendous activity that happened there. Phoenix became the epitome of a nationwide VA accountability problem, and rightly so.

However, in many ways, the Central Alabama VA could also be considered a poster child for the need of reform of the Department of Veterans Affairs from top to bottom. It might not have garnered as many headlines as Phoenix, but the nature and extent of the abuse inside the Central Alabama VA was every bit as bad, if not worse.

My staff and I worked with courageous whistleblowers and dedicated journalists to pull back the curtain there. Here are just a handful of examples of what we found:

More than 900 X-ray cancer screenings, some showing malignancies, were lost and unread for years. When alerted to the problem, top administrators tried to cover it up.

A VA pulmonologist manipulated more than 1,200 patient records, but even after being caught twice, was still given an satisfactory review.

Perhaps the most disturbing is a Central Alabama VA employee took a recovering veteran to a crack house and bought him drugs and provided him prostitutes in order to extort his VA payments. And even when caught, this employee was not fired, not until 1½ years later, when we exposed it in the newspaper.

The crack incident stands out in my mind for many reasons. First, it still haunts me to my core just how callous

and uncaring a person could be to do such a thing to a veteran patient. Second, it illustrates just how complacent the bureaucracy had become to let that behavior slide. And third, it is chilling to think that we would never have even known about it if not for a brave VA employee who walked into my Montgomery office and handed us a copy of the police report.

Thankfully, under the 2014 reform law, the director of the Central Alabama VA was fired in the wake of these exposures. That law took an important step toward speeding up the termination process for top officials. But did you know that he remains the only senior official fired as a result of the VA scandal?

Mr. Speaker, we all know that law did not go far enough. For one thing, it did not extend the strict accountability standards to rank-and-file employees. Senior managers aren't the only ones responsible for the failures at the VA. There has been a culture of complacency up and down the chain of command for a very long time, and the complicated process for disciplining or removing problem employees only makes it worse.

That law also didn't go far enough to protect whistleblowers. There is no question in my mind that without the courage of those who came forward to tell the truth, very little would have changed at the Central Alabama VA, if anything at all, yet those whistleblowers were the very targets of retaliation from supervisors and other officials.

Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity to take that next step on behalf of our veterans and those who are working to serve them. S. 1094, the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, grants the VA Secretary the power to fire, demote, or suspend any VA employee no matter their rank. The bill also increases protections for whistleblowers who put themselves at risk to improve the lives and care for veterans.

Let me say that most VA employees care a great deal about veterans and work very hard to provide the best service. It is not fair for the hard-working employees of the VA that a few bad actors get to evade punishment. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. David Shulkin, has said he wants greater authority to remove bad employees as he sees fit. It is time for Congress to give him that authority and to let him know what we expect and that we expect him to use it.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to do the right thing by our veterans, to pass this legislation today and send it to the President's desk.

CANARY IN THE OBAMACARE COAL MINE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, ObamaCare has created a healthcare crisis for the people in my district. Not long ago, I received this letter from one of my constituents in Knoxville: "I just read where Humana Insurance Company will not offer health insurance in any of the exchanges in 2018. This puts my wife in a predicament, as there will be no health insurance companies offering health insurance in 2018 in Knoxville at this time. We need help with this mounting issue, as I am sure there are a lot more of us in the same boat. When we first signed up for ACA insurance 3 years ago, her monthly premium was \$245. The second year it was \$660. This year it is \$963 a month. This is absolutely ridiculous for a person on a limited income."

Many thousands in Tennessee and across the Nation have very similar stories. My constituent was right. It is ridiculous. Now, even this expensive insurance will disappear, and there are a lot of people in the same boat as my constituent and his wife.

Because there has been so much publicity about how the Republicans now control both Congress and the White House, it seems a great many people do not realize that we are still totally and completely under ObamaCare. A bill was passed in the House, but a different version is being discussed in the Senate. So Republicans have not yet done anything to change ObamaCare. So if someone is still having trouble getting health insurance or is still paying too much for their insurance, it is still because of ObamaCare.

Just today, in the nonpartisan Capitol Hill newspaper, The Hill, is this headline, "Insurer exits bolster GOP case for ObamaCare repeal." Insurance companies are still pulling out right and left all over the country because of ObamaCare. ObamaCare is still imploding all over the country.

ObamaCare's allegedly compassionate regulations were supposed to guarantee access to healthcare for the sick. Instead, they have made access worse. Current propaganda seems to be persuading some people that ObamaCare is really protecting the people it claims to be, but Harvard and others are finding otherwise in their studies. They are finding that the ObamaCare regulations literally penalize insurers who offer quality coverage for the sick. This motivates insurers to offer only unattractive plans to people with expensive medical conditions.

The insurance company who offers the best plans ends up with the most—and the sickest—enrollees, and so the highest costs. Sadly, this is causing a race to the bottom. The ObamaCare regulations are causing everyone, including people with preexisting conditions, to have low-quality coverage or no insurance options at all.

ObamaCare's harmful government regulations have driven every insurer out of the marketplace exchange in 16 counties in the Knoxville region. For

43,000 Tennesseans—unless Blue Cross Blue Shield can come back into the area, which they are considering—there will be no exchange plans available after December.

But it is not just in Knoxville. Millions of Americans have only one insurer left in the exchange, if any. ObamaCare's regulations are driving out more and more insurers every day, leaving Americans with less choice and ultimately no choice.

Throwing more taxpayer money at this problem won't solve it. This will continue to happen all across this country as long as we have ObamaCare's harmful regulations on the books.

Knoxville, Tennessee, is the canary in the ObamaCare coal mine. Mr. Speaker, President Trump says he wants to repeal ObamaCare. He should send his healthcare people to Knoxville, talk and listen to our people, share my constituents' stories, show the American people that ObamaCare's regulations are the cause of our Nation's crisis and are limiting access to healthcare.

If President Trump goes before the Nation on national television and explains in understandable detail what is going on with ObamaCare now and how he is trying to fix it, the American people will rally once again to repeal ObamaCare's harmful government regulations.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD this Wall Street Journal article written by Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the Cato Institute.

[From the Wall Street Journal, Feb. 28, 2017]

HOW OBAMACARE PUNISHES THE SICK (By Michael Cannon)

Republicans are nervous about repealing ObamaCare's supposed ban on discrimination against patients with pre-existing conditions. But a new study by Harvard and the University of Texas-Austin finds those rules penalize high-quality coverage for the sick, reward insurers who slash coverage for the sick, and leave patients unable to obtain adequate insurance.

The researchers estimate a patient with multiple sclerosis, for example, might file \$61,000 in claims. ObamaCare's rules let MS patients buy coverage for far less, forcing insurers to take a loss on every MS patient. That creates "an incentive to avoid enrolling people who are in worse health" by making policies "unattractive to people with expensive health conditions," the Kaiser Family Foundation explains.

To mitigate that perverse incentive, ObamaCare lobs all manner of taxpayer subsidies at insurers. Yet the researchers find insurers still receive just \$47,000 in revenue per MS patient—a \$14,000 loss per patient.

Predictably, that triggers a race to the bottom. Each year, whichever insurer offers the best MS coverage attracts the most MS patients and racks up the most losses. Insurers that offer high-quality coverage either leave the market, as many have, or slash their coverage. Let's call those losses what they are: penalties for offering high-quality coverage.

The result is lower-quality coverage—for MS, rheumatoid arthritis, infertility and other expensive conditions. The researchers