

I certainly agree. When President Obama was elected, Republicans worked across the aisle to confirm seven—seven—of his nominees on inauguration day and five more by the end of his first week. These nominees were hardly centrists. We had reservations about many of them. But Democrats had won the Presidency and the Senate, and we hadn't. I ask our friends across the aisle to now demonstrate the same courtesy and seriousness for President-Elect Trump's nominees, especially his national security team.

The Senate has a longstanding tradition of confirming the Cabinet nominees of a newly elected administration in a timely fashion, and the Senate and its committees are now following the same standard for President-Elect Trump and his nominees as we have for past Presidents.

I know some are urging Democrats to play partisan games and needless delay. I hope they will not. The American people will see through it, anyway.

Here is a perfect example. The Democratic leader has been quoting a letter I sent to then-Senator Harry Reid in 2009. He apparently missed the fact that the letter he has been quoting was not only sent after every one of President Obama's eligible nominees had hearings but after all but one had been confirmed. So it is actually an important reminder of how Republicans fairly treated incoming President Obama's Cabinet nominees and how Democrats should now do the same.

This is time for serious consideration and cooperation. Americans aren't looking for partisan games. We are a nation at war. We are a nation grappling with a slow economy. Americans want the incoming President to have his national and economic security teams in place to get to work. They want us to work together across the aisle to get this done.

That is what Republicans did in 2009, it is what we are doing now, and it is what we invite our Democratic friends to join us in getting accomplished.

OBAMACARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, families across the country have been hurt by ObamaCare's rising costs and limited choices, and we continue to hear the stories from constituents back home.

My own home State of Kentucky was once championed as a success story by ObamaCare supporters. That is hardly the case today. Too many Kentuckians are watching their insurance premiums grow higher and higher. They are struggling to meet deductibles so high that their insurance is almost useless. They are watching their friends and neighbors lose their plans or access to family doctors. They sit around the kitchen table and try to budget for their family's future. They know one thing for sure: The promises of ObamaCare have failed them.

ObamaCare promised lower costs, but premiums have skyrocketed. It promised families could keep their plans or doctors, but many have seen their options, in fact, limited. Kentuckians want to see lower costs, more choices, and better care. But after 7 long years of rising costs and diminishing options, ObamaCare has not delivered, and the people of Kentucky are demanding change. They have been loud and clear in their distaste for ObamaCare.

Like other Members here, I have received letters, emails, and phone calls. I have met with constituents directly who are feeling the pain of higher costs and fewer choices.

Consider this mom in Kentucky. She is facing a higher cost of health insurance, and she literally doesn't know what to do. Here is what she said:

My family is being pushed out of the middle class by the ObamaCare law. How can we pay almost \$1,200 a month on health insurance?

Listen to this veteran and father from Louisville. After his plan was discontinued, he tried to buy insurance through ObamaCare, only to find that his children's pediatrician wouldn't accept it. This dad worries that unless something is done, he will be "one of thousands of Kentuckians that will find that they do not have insurance options."

I have heard from many constituents expressing similar frustration, disappointment, and anger about the outcomes of ObamaCare. They expected the law to deliver on its promises, but, instead, they paid more and received less.

This year the cost of insurance premiums in Kentucky spiked up to 47 percent. These price increases are a direct result of instability injected into the market by ObamaCare. Families across Kentucky are scrambling to find ways to fit the extra expenses into their budgets.

To make matters worse, the choices that families once had for health insurance continue to disappear. Nearly half of the counties in Kentucky only have one option for a health insurance provider on the exchange, and, when there is only one choice, there is really no choice at all.

For the people of Kentucky and for people across the country, repeal means relief. The time to act is now.

However, our friends on the other side of the aisle are doing everything they can to stop us from fulfilling our promise to help the American people. Instead of continuing to push their political agenda, I urge them to help us. I ask them to listen to the American people, who are demanding change. A recent Gallup poll showed that 8 out of 10 Americans wanted to see ObamaCare significantly changed—significantly changed—or completely replaced.

It is time to admit it. ObamaCare has failed. This partisan experiment is hurting more than it is helping. It is time to finally move past it and replace it with something that works.

The repeal resolution is the first step to bring relief to hardworking Americans and to prevent health insurance markets from imploding. Next, we need to work together to replace ObamaCare with health care policies that actually work for families. Once we repeal ObamaCare, we can use the stable transition period to deliver on another promise.

I would encourage colleagues on both sides to offer their input as we work to lower costs, increase choices, and promote better care. But one thing is certain. Republicans will continue to follow through on our promises and act on behalf of our constituents to bring relief from ObamaCare.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as hearings for the President-elect's nominees get underway starting today, I want to reiterate that a fair and thorough vetting process is a top priority, not only for my caucus but for the American people.

Chief to achieving that is a fair hearing schedule and process. First, it means hearings that are sufficiently spaced out so Members who sit on multiple committees can actually attend all the hearings. It means only holding hearings after the full committee paperwork—OGE review, FBI background check, and a full divestment plan—has been received and Senators have adequate time to review the information. That means, if there are Senators with remaining questions that weren't covered in a first hearing, they can have the nominee come back for a second day.

Our caucus and much of America was alarmed and disappointed by the announcements of the hearing schedule this week, which did not meet these basic courtesies and best practices that have always been extended in the past. However, I am happy to say that after negotiating with my friend the majority leader and his respective committee chairs, we have been able to make some progress on a fair hearing process.

I appreciate the majority leader's openness and efforts to accommodate our caucus in the last few days. Originally there were six hearings scheduled for this Wednesday, all especially important Cabinet posts: State, Attorney General, Education, Transportation, Homeland Security, CIA. That was largely unprecedented. We have looked back in history and can only find one instance where there were that many hearings of important Cabinet members on one day like that.

After negotiations with the majority leader, we have moved things around so

that there are now only three hearings scheduled for Wednesday: Secretary of State, Transportation, and the second day of the AG hearings. All of these nominees have their paperwork in. The nominee for Secretary of Education, who does not yet have a signed ethics agreement and whose paperwork is not close to complete, was moved. That hearing will take place next week, pending her paperwork being submitted with time for Senators to review.

It is still a busy week. It is a little too busy for my personal taste, but it is a good first step. I hope we can continue to negotiate in good faith, to sort out the schedule in a way that is acceptable to both of our caucuses.

I also want to make clear that this progress does not mean our caucus is any less intent on having the President-elect's nominees complete the standard ethics forms, questionnaires, and FBI background checks required of every nominee. To have all this information come in after the hearing is sort of like "Alice in Wonderland"—it makes no sense and has things upside down. I am still concerned, for example, that we don't have a completed FBI background check for the nominee for Secretary of State. His hearing starts tomorrow. And today there are reports in the media that under Rex Tillerson's leadership, Exxon conducted business with Iran, potentially in violation of U.S. sanctions law. There are serious questions that need to be answered.

In this particular case, Mr. Tillerson should release all his tax returns and promise to answer any questions on the Iran dealings that members ask. This is too serious a subject to have questions ducked. It demands a completely open airing of all relevant information. Did Mr. Tillerson go around our Iran sanctions simply to line Exxon's pockets? That would be a very bad thing. The American people ought to know about it before the Senate has to vote to confirm. For Rex Tillerson to answer the questions, and particularly questions about Exxon setting up a separate subsidiary to get around our Iran sanctions, is what the Founding Fathers wanted us to do when they enumerated in the advise and consent process.

This is not a partisan game. We are not doing this for sport. These aren't obscure procedural complaints. This is standard process. As I reminded my friend the majority leader yesterday, this is the same exact process my counterpart demanded in 2009 when the shoe was on the other foot. Just as then-Minority Leader MCCONNELL laid out in his 2009 letter to then-Majority Leader Reid, Democrats expect each nominee to have all the prerequisites, with time to review, before we move forward with the hearings. President Obama's nominees completed all of their paperwork in 2009 before the hearings. We expect nothing less from President-Elect Trump's nominees. Particularly, we expect the paperwork to be all in with

time to review. Having the paperwork in at 7 a.m. and holding a hearing at 10 a.m. is unacceptable. We expect there will be adequate time for followup questions on a second day of hearings if Senators are unable to finish their questions.

Today my colleague the majority leader said: Well, most of the Cabinet nominees were in already when this letter came out. But the letter doesn't specify who. It includes Cabinet members, and there were future Cabinet members who would come forward. It is a good standard. We are all for it. We are asking our friends on the other side of the aisle to stick with it. What was good for them in 2009 is good for the country in 2017.

We are insistent on the process because it is the right thing to do; it is the American thing to do. We don't hide nominees and rush them through. They have huge power. If the President-elect and our Republican colleagues are as proud of the nominees as they state, then they should be happy to have them answer a lot of questions in a hearing that is not rushed. It is how we will ensure that Cabinet officials, who are imbued with an immense power in our government, are ethically and substantively qualified for these positions.

If there is any group of Cabinet nominees that cries out for this process, it is this group of nominees. This proposed Cabinet is unlike any other. It is wealthier than any other. It has complex webs of corporate connections—so many of the nominees—that pose huge potential conflict of interest problems. Frankly, it is the most hard-right Cabinet in its ideology. It is quite different from the way President-Elect Trump campaigned. The potential conflicts of interest for multimillionaires such as Rex Tillerson or Betsy DeVos or Steve Mnuchin are enormous.

As I said, the nominees have views far to the right of what the President campaigned on. The most glaring example is Representative PRICE. His whole career has been focused on ending Medicare as we know it. My colleague the majority leader said the American people want us to move forward and give President-Elect Trump his nominees. If they knew that one of the nominees had been dedicated to basically getting rid of Medicare, would they want us to vote for him? I will bet not. It sure explains why they want to rush these nominees through.

They don't want all of these things brought to light, but that is the wrong thing to do. We are going to fight to get to the right thing to do. The American people have a right to know if they voted for a President who might be going back on one of his key campaign promises. They deserve nothing less than open and deliberate hearings going forward. Will Representative PRICE stick with what President-Elect Trump said—no cuts to Medicare, Medicaid—or will he pursue his lifelong dream of privatizing and limiting

them? We shall see, but we need answers at hearings before we vote. The American people are entitled to it.

Once again, I thank the majority leader for dealing in good faith and trying to address our concerns. I hope for the sake of the national interests that our two parties can come together on an agreement for the remainder of the process, as we have for the process so far.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last night the Senate Democrats held the floor late into the night to demonstrate our solidarity and commitment to defending ACA, to defending the tens of millions of Americans who have been afforded the opportunity to access care for the first time and the tens of millions more whose coverage is fairer, more generous, and more affordable because of the law.

More than 35 Members participated on the floor or on Facebook Live, Snapchat, or Twitter. I thank each and every one of the Members on my side—the vast majority of our caucus—for participating. Many of them discussed the threat the Republican plan to make America sick again poses to the health care of 300 million Americans. Beyond that, the Republican budget resolution calls for a massive increase in the Federal debt.

Yesterday Shaun Donovan, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, released a letter explaining that this budget resolution would allow publicly held debt to increase by \$9.5 trillion, from \$14.2 trillion in 2016 to \$23.7 trillion in 2026.

Our colleagues have talked about being deficit hawks. Democrats bring up ideas. They say: Can't do it; it increases the deficit. Well, is that going to apply to this, which increases the deficit by massive amounts? The deficit would exceed \$1.3 trillion in 2026. That is almost as high as the \$1.4 trillion at the depths of that recession and financial crisis President Obama had to meet. Are my colleagues now going to do a 180-degree reversal and say that now a debt increase of such dramatic numbers is OK? I hope not. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be fair. It wouldn't be consistent.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a copy of Director Donovan's letter.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT,
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT
AND BUDGET,

Washington, DC, January 9, 2017.

Hon. JOHN A. YARMUTH,
Ranking Member, House Budget Committee,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

Hon. RICHARD E. NEAL,
Ranking Member, House Ways and Means Committee,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN YARMUTH AND CONGRESSMAN NEAL: I am writing in response to