

Israeli-Palestinian conflict that protects the rights and security of both peoples.

Neither goal can be achieved by pursuing policies that further inflame tensions and erode the role of the United States as an honest broker for peace.

There are any number of qualified Americans who could capably support that role. Mr. Friedman is not among them.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, our Ambassador to Israel is one of our most consequential diplomatic posts. Israel is our greatest friend and ally in the Middle East and one of our closest partners in the world. The bonds between our peoples have been unbreakable from Israel's beginning. Israel is a bastion of democracy and prosperity in a violent and unstable region, where Israel faces relentless threats to its security. It is imperative that our Ambassador to Israel have an even temperament, the utmost of integrity, and the ability to forge unity across entrenched divisions.

I have a profound and steadfast commitment to Israel and to the Jewish community. That is why I am so concerned with David Friedman's nomination to become Ambassador to Israel.

Mr. Friedman appears to have few, if any, of the qualities needed for this position. He is an extraordinarily polarizing figure who has expressed views far outside of the longstanding bipartisan consensus on Israel. His body of published work makes clear his extreme positions. Mr. Friedman has asserted that Israel cannot trust the majority of American Jews. He has accused the entire State Department—an institution he now seeks to join—of anti-Semitism. He has called our coalition allies and partners in the fight against the Islamic State “cowards,” “hypocrites,” and “freeloaders.” Given his radical and divisive rhetoric, I do not believe that he is capable of forging unity at home or stability abroad.

Furthermore, Mr. Friedman has written that he does not believe in a two-state solution. For decades, through Democratic and Republican administrations alike, the United States and the international community have held that the two-state solution is the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Mr. Friedman's position on the two-state solution, coupled with his offensive statements, led five former U.S. Ambassadors to Israel to urge the Senate not to confirm him.

Shimon Peres, one of Israel's greatest leaders, once said, “Our problem is not to submit to the differences but to overcome them.” Americans and Israelis deserve nothing less than an Ambassador who lives up to this ethos, one who seeks to strengthen Israel by advancing peace in the region. Given Mr. Friedman's public statements, I doubt that he can be that person. For these reasons, I cannot support his nomination.

Mr. FRANKEN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, at 2:15 p.m., the Senate vote on the Friedman nomination and that, if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action with no intervening action or debate.

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

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for a period of 10 minutes.

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

PATIENT PROTECTION AND AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly known as ObamaCare, on its seventh anniversary of being signed into law by our previous President, Barack Obama.

Looking back at what has happened to healthcare over the past 7 years, there isn't a whole lot of good news to report. Since that time, Americans have been hit with hundreds of billions in new taxes, healthcare costs have risen exponentially, and families have struggled with fewer options and reduced access to healthcare services.

Just in the last year, healthcare premiums have gone up 25 percent for the typical ObamaCare plan. That number is even higher in my home State of South Dakota where premiums have increased 37 percent. ObamaCare has also driven health insurance companies to completely leave the marketplace, leaving Americans with fewer insurance options. Again, I will use my own State as an example. Under ObamaCare, the number of companies offering insurance in the individual market in South Dakota has dropped from 13 to a mere 2 today. While this is unfortunate, we are better off than folks in Alaska, Alabama, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wyoming, all of whom have no options at all, as only one insurer offers plans in those exchanges. This is also the case for more than 1,000 counties across the Nation, basically one-third of all the counties in total.

As a result of these skyrocketing costs and reduced options, the number of Americans enrolling in ObamaCare continues to drop dramatically. Projections continue to be millions fewer than predicted. Between 2016 and 2017, nearly a half-million fewer Americans signed up for the exchange. All of this has barely moved the number of uninsured South Dakotans between 2010,

when ObamaCare was enacted, and today. So the health insurance market was crippled, premiums have skyrocketed for hard-working families, and our economy has suffered tremendously under the ACA, only to have the same number of insured and uninsured individuals in my home State as before we started.

Nationwide, Americans are rejecting ObamaCare in record numbers. We saw this rejection of ObamaCare repeatedly over the past 7 years, when the American people elected into office candidates who at least in part ran on the platform of repealing ObamaCare. ObamaCare's higher taxes, fees, and penalties on businesses and investors have also taken a toll. Meanwhile, consumers who are facing higher premiums and deductibles have less to spend on goods and services. With one-sixth of our economy tied to healthcare, this has been detrimental to growth and to opportunity. It has also been easy to see how the healthcare industry has rejected ObamaCare over the past 7 years, with many insurers pulling out of the market and in other places the markets collapsing altogether. This limits competition and leaves little room in the healthcare industry, which is why ObamaCare is failing to control the cost of healthcare in our country. Cost control is a crucial component in providing truly affordable healthcare, and that begins with the elimination of ObamaCare's added bureaucracy and paperwork. We must get government out of the way and allow competitive markets to work once again, and that is what we are seeking to do with ObamaCare's replacement, which is expected to receive a vote in the House later today.

Since we started the process of repealing and replacing ObamaCare, my office has received a number of calls and emails from South Dakotans who have expressed concerns. I want to make it clear to them and to all Americans that during the period in which we transition away from ObamaCare and toward a more affordable, competitive system, we understand that the continuation of coverage is an essential component. We plan to include a number of items that are very important to the American public: guaranteed renewal of coverage, portability of coverage for those who change jobs or leave the workforce by retiring, and a ban on lifetime limits, because if you bought insurance, you shouldn't run out of insurance.

The provisions of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act which were included in ObamaCare should be included in our plans. There should be no exclusions on preexisting conditions if one maintains insurance from policy to policy, without lapses, and we should include provisions to allow children to remain on their families' plans until they are at least the age of 26.

We understand that there is a way to retain all of these positive provisions

which are vital to ensuring continued health insurance coverage for all American families who want it, while also providing a fair and open marketplace that provides a strong, healthy, competitive market. This, in turn, will bring affordable, efficient health insurance with innovative products that will actually help to control the cost of care. That is what the GOP alternative, while still far from perfect, is seeking to do. One thing we do know is that the end result will be better than ObamaCare.

As a father and a grandfather, I understand how important it is to have access to affordable healthcare. No one should be priced out of healthcare coverage for one's family. But our current system is simply not working. After 7 years of ObamaCare, the American people are dealing with higher healthcare premiums, fewer options, more taxes, and reduced access to care. Health providers are struggling with more bureaucracy, with more time spent filling out paperwork instead of caring for patients, and being frustrated by ObamaCare's crippling new regulations.

As I have said from time to time, ObamaCare is a rapidly sinking ship, and there is simply no hope for a recovery. On its seventh anniversary, it is hurting more people than it is helping, and it must be repealed and replaced before it totally crumbles under its own weight.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to comment on the nomination of Mr. Friedman to be the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. Shortly, we will be having that vote.

I consider the U.S.-Israel relationship to be a strategic anchor for the United States in the Middle East and one of our most important relationships with any country. Since the creation of the State of Israel, support for this relationship has been bipartisan, bicameral, and supported by successive U.S. administrations. This bilateral relationship is also sustained by the deep bonds of friendship between the people of our two countries. This relationship has benefited Israel and has benefited the United States.

Given the range of strategic challenges across the globe that our country faces and the unprecedented instability and violence embroiled in the Middle East today, it is critical that we take steps to unify support for the U.S.-Israel relationship across the political spectrum. Thus, I believe it is vital that the U.S. Ambassador to Israel be seen as a unifying figure in this enduring relationship.

I really do believe that there is broad understanding and support in the Senate and the House for the special relationship between the United States and Israel—Israel, the only true democracy

in the Middle East, a country that we can rely on for important intelligence information and that has an economy which is similar to ours. It is a country that has enjoyed a special relationship with the United States since 1948, when Harry Truman recognized Israel after the historic vote at the United Nations.

Following extensive consideration of Mr. Friedman's record and taking into account his statements during his nomination hearing, I have concluded that his past record would make it very difficult for him to serve as that unifying force. For that reason, I am unable to support his nomination as America's top diplomat in Israel.

I appreciate Mr. Friedman's efforts before the committee to express regret for his substantial record of divisive, inflammatory, and offensive statements. Unfortunately, I believe the body of Mr. Friedman's published works, not to mention his public statements, will compromise his effectiveness in representing the United States and all Americans, as well as the Government of Israel and all Israelis.

Taken together, Mr. Friedman's statements and affiliations make it clear that he does not believe a two-state solution is necessary for a just and lasting peace. I am concerned that Mr. Friedman's history on this issue, in which he calls the two-state solution a scam, will undermine his ability to represent the United States as a credible facilitator of the peace process. There is simply no realistic, sustainable prospect for lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians other than as two states, living side by side, with security.

I thank Chairman CORKER for the manner in which this nomination was handled before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I think we had ample opportunity, and I thank Chairman CORKER for that, but I do urge my colleagues to reject this nominee.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate, notwithstanding the previous order, move to the rollcall vote now.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Friedman nomination?

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 96 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Burr	Hatch	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Cochran	Inhofe	Scott
Collins	Johnson	Shelby
Corker	Kennedy	Strange
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cotton	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Manchin	Tillis
Cruz	McCaïn	Toomey
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Menendez	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Murkowski	

NAYS—46

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Peters
Bennet	Harris	Reed
Blumenthal	Hassan	Sanders
Booker	Heinrich	Schatz
Brown	Heitkamp	Schumer
Cantwell	Hirono	Shaheen
Cardin	Kaine	Stabenow
Carper	King	Tester
Casey	Klobuchar	Udall
Coons	Leahy	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Markey	Warner
Donnelly	McCaskill	Warren
Duckworth	Merkley	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murphy	Wyden
Feinstein	Murray	
Franken	Nelson	

NOT VOTING—2

Isakson Paul

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

PROTOCOL TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY OF 1949 ON THE ACCESSION OF MONTENEGRO

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 1, treaty document No. 114-12, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The treaty will be stated.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Treaty document No. 114-12, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro.