

She wrote to me and said: "This has to stop—and quality, flexible plans need to return for individuals."

I agree with her.

Another wrote in to say that before ObamaCare her daughter was getting what she considered to be adequate healthcare insurance for about \$190 a month with just a \$500 deductible. Now that has gone up to a payment of almost \$400 a month—roughly, doubled—with a deductible of more than \$6,000. What are people supposed to do with a deductible of \$6,000 which says you have to pay \$6,000 before your insurance pays a penny? It is essentially no good to most hard-working, middle class families.

So ObamaCare does not equal healthcare that is affordable or better for Americans. It is simply not working.

In fact, in Texas, if you have a gross income of about \$24,000 a year, under ObamaCare, you could end up spending about 30 percent of your total income on healthcare costs alone—30 percent of your gross income on healthcare and related costs.

Fortunately, thanks to the passage of the American Healthcare Act, or the AHCA, which passed the House last week, we have the beginning of a path forward to provide a lifeline to those people who are simply priced out of the market today—the 30 million people who don't have insurance—and those who simply can't use the health coverage they have under ObamaCare.

So I look forward to working with our Senate colleagues—hopefully, all of our Senate colleagues, if they are willing—to help improve the House bill and to get it passed in this Chamber and signed by the President.

This is not something we can do without the support of every Republican Senator, but my hope is that we would do this with the help of more than just Republicans.

Our goal to repeal and replace this bill has been, of course, no secret.

We need legislation that will reform Medicaid. With the American Healthcare Act, we have the first major healthcare entitlement reform in a generation, without eliminating anybody who is currently covered by Medicaid today.

We also need to do away with ObamaCare's job-killing taxes, like the individual and the employer mandate. I remember, in Tyler, TX, a few years ago, meeting with a single mom who worked in a restaurant who told me that her hours had been cut from 40 hours a week to less than 30 hours a week because her employer didn't want to pay the employer mandate and so basically had to cut people from full-time work back to part-time work. So what did she do? She had to get another job as a single mom, working in a restaurant in Tyler, TX. That is the sort of unintended consequence of ObamaCare.

Then there is the medical device tax—something the Presiding Officer

has led on—which is a tax on innovation. This isn't even a tax on income. It is a tax on gross receipts. I have had some medical device companies from my State tell me they have had to move their operations to Costa Rica in order to avoid the medical device tax, which has crippled their ability to innovate and invest in their business. Then there is the tax on investments and the tax on prescription drugs. Middle-income Americans and our job creators need and will get massive tax relief when we repeal and replace ObamaCare.

So that is what 52 Members of the Republican conference are working on and what we would like to work on with our colleagues across the aisle, if they are willing to help. We welcome their ideas. Actually, a bipartisan solution would be preferable to one done strictly along party lines. But all Members of the Republican conference are at the table working on that today. There is no denying that our country can't afford another one-size-fits-all approach to healthcare. The American people need relief from the unworkable, unsustainable system that President Obama promised—or delivered, which is very different from what he promised. I am confident that we can get there by working together to responsibly provide relief and, in doing so, empower individuals to deliver more options and competition and responsibly help those who need care to have more access to it.

I yield the floor.

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

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 37, Jeffrey Rosen to be Deputy Secretary of Transportation.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Jeffrey A. Rosen, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of Transportation.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Jeffrey A. Rosen, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of Transportation.

Mitch McConnell, John Cornyn, Tom Cotton, Dan Sullivan, Shelley Moore Capito, John Barrasso, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Rounds, Orrin G. Hatch, Bill Cassidy, Pat Roberts, Mike Crapo, Lamar Alexander, Richard Burr, John Thune, Jerry Moran, James E. Risch.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

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

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

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 35, Rachel L. Brand to be Associate Attorney General.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Rachel L. Brand, of Iowa, to be Associate Attorney General.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Rachel L. Brand, of Iowa, to be Associate Attorney General.

Mitch McConnell, John Boozman, Jeff Flake, Thom Tillis, Richard Burr, Mike Crapo, John Barrasso, Chuck Grassley, Mike Rounds, John Kennedy, John Thune, Pat Roberts, James E. Risch, Orrin G. Hatch, Shelley Moore Capito, Lindsey Graham, John Cornyn.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

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

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

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

CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT RESOLUTION

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I am proud that the Senate voted to reject an effort to overturn commonsense protections to reduce methane waste. It was 3 years ago that satellite images from NASA revealed that there is a giant cloud of methane—about the size of the State of Delaware—sitting over the Four Corners region in Northwestern New Mexico and Southwestern Colorado.

Although evidence had shown that there was methane air pollution in the Four Corners as early as 2003, the image of NASA data is truly striking. This is a warning of a potentially major threat to public health for communities in the region.

The San Juan Basin in the Four Corners region has long been a leading producer of oil and natural gas. With the natural gas boom of the mid-2000s, production in the basin grew by leaps and bounds, and that created hundreds of new high-paying jobs and a major new domestic source of an important energy resource.

Unfortunately, amid all this growth, some producers developing natural gas on our public lands and on Tribal lands released harmful air pollution and wasted these publicly owned resources by allowing methane to leak into the air from faulty equipment and pipes, and even by burning off valuable natural gas in the process called flaring.

Following the discovery of the methane hotspot, researchers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory joined Caltech and University of Michigan scientists to conduct a detailed study into the cause of the methane cloud. Some producers claimed that the hotspot was caused primarily by natural seeps of gas from underground geologic formations and by gas venting out from an old coal mine in the region.

The NASA researchers, using instrumentation mounted on aircraft that flew close to the ground and throughout 1,200 square miles of airspace in the Four Corners region, identified leaks from natural gas wells as the major methane emitters contributing to the methane air pollution.

As greenhouse gas, methane has over 80 times the global warming potential as carbon dioxide over the short term. We have a moral obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to mitigate our contributions to climate change.

Even absent its consequences for climate change, methane leaks waste valuable energy resources, and they harm public health. When methane leaks from oil and gas wells, harmful carcinogens such as benzene leak into the air alongside it.

Because of the air pollution over the Four Corners region, the American

Lung Association gave San Juan County in New Mexico an F rating for ozone pollution in 2016. That means children suffer more asthma attacks and seniors have more difficulty breathing.

I want it to be clear that this is not a case of pitting development of our energy resources against human health. We have a golden opportunity to apply innovative, existing technologies to this problem, grow our economy, and improve air quality for the people of the Four Corners region. That is because minimizing the amount of methane that leaks, vents, or flares out of the oil and gas wells isn't just good for air quality, it is good for business and the bottom line.

When oil and gas companies modernize their equipment to reduce leaks, they are able to capture more gas that they can sell, as well as increase worker safety at their wells. When we capture more gas, that also means we see more royalties and revenues for States, Tribes, and local communities. By updating oil and natural gas production equipment and infrastructure to reduce wasted natural gas, we create new jobs for energy workers and manufacturers.

When we reduce wasteful leaks, it means that instead of having a giant methane cloud over the northwest corner of New Mexico and over the Navajo Nation—a major public health hazard—we put our publicly owned natural gas resources to beneficial use. That is the definition of a win-win situation.

I say all this because that is exactly what the Bureau of Land Management's methane waste prevention rule is designed to do. These commonsense and cost-effective protections in the rule were put in place to reduce harmful methane and benzene pollution and to ensure that oil and gas operations are using technological advances that minimize emissions and maximize the amount of natural gas we produce.

Between 2009 and 2015, the BLM estimates that oil and gas producers on our public and Tribal lands vented, flared, and leaked 462 billion cubic feet of methane. They wasted enough natural gas to supply over 6 million American households for a year. Instead of heating our homes or fueling powerplants, powering buses, that gas was leaked into the atmosphere, wasting millions of dollars of this limited resource.

It is estimated that the oil and gas industry wastes about \$100 million worth of natural gas every year. That also means \$6 million each year of lost State revenue, revenue that pays for schools, roads, and emergency services in New Mexico. That is quite a figure.

A recent report found that New Mexico taxpayers have lost out on over \$42 million of royalty revenues since the year 2009—\$42,728,949 to be exact. The BLM's methane waste prevention rule will help put a stop to this wasted resource.

While developing the rule, the BLM held public meetings, it held Tribal consultations, and it factored in feed-

back from over 300,000 comments submitted during the public comment period. The agency also coordinated with States like Colorado, Wyoming, and North Dakota that have already created similar protections to reduce methane leaking and flaring at the State level.

The BLM rule will have minimal costs for oil and gas producers, and, in fact, leak detections and repairs required by the rule will help companies make more money selling the gas that they save. Meanwhile, this rule will grow our economy by investing in innovative companies that have developed the technologies to minimize leaks and protect our public health. This rule should not have been controversial.

The overwhelming majority of my constituents in New Mexico support reducing wasted natural gas. A recent poll by Colorado College conducted after the election found that 74 percent of New Mexicans support the BLM's methane waste reduction rule.

I am proud that enough Senators shared that view and voted to reject an attempt to repeal this commonsense protection of public health, air quality, and responsible development of our natural resources. There is nothing conservative about making it easier to waste a precious public energy source.

We should be focused on reducing waste, capturing critical royalties for New Mexico communities, and putting our natural gas resources to beneficial use. This repeal effort of the methane rule would have represented a major step backward.

Today's vote was a major victory for responsible development of our natural gas resources and our Nation's decades-long commitment to protect the air we breathe. On behalf of my constituents and theirs, I want to say a special thank-you to all 51 Senators who supported our efforts today. Thank you very much.

Mr. President, I yield back the remainder of my time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FIRING OF JAMES COMEY

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss President Trump's decision to fire FBI Director James Comey. During his campaign, then-Candidate Trump regularly talked about how he would be the law and order President. "Law and order" means different things to different people, but all of us should be able to agree that we cannot have law and order without the rule of law.

The rule of law is not a new or even uniquely American idea. It dates back to the Magna Carta of 1215. This document—a pact between King John of