

health insurance or you shouldn't have to pay twice the premiums. That is something that is now built into the law that the Republicans want to repeal. Well, I want to make sure that preexisting conditions are protected.

As I have said on the floor before, a couple of weeks ago I had a heart procedure, a catheter procedure, an outpatient procedure. Apparently it worked pretty well. I am standing here talking to you today. I feel good. But a lot of people go through this, and I became a statistic the day that happened. I guess I now have a preexisting condition; so be it. One out of three Americans fit that category. Why would we not protect them in any health insurance reform bill? That seems like the starting point in our conversation. Yet the bill that passed the House, the Republican bill that passed the House allows Governors to basically ask for waivers so that health insurance plans in their States will not cover people with preexisting conditions or allow people with those conditions to have the same premiums. That is not a good starting place. It is a terrible starting place.

Let's try to make sure that if we are going to move forward on real healthcare reform, we do it in a sensible fashion. Let's put forward a bill not like the one that passed the House, but let's put together a bill that has the support of hospital administrators across the Nation. Let's put together a bill that protects the Medicaid expansion that is part of the Affordable Care Act.

Medicaid is an essential part of healthcare in America for tens of millions of people. Medicaid—most people think, oh, that is health insurance for poor people. Really? That is not an accurate description. For example, in the State of Illinois, Medicaid provides health coverage for half of the children who are born in my State—prenatal care, postnatal care, and the actual delivery of half of the children in my State, under Medicaid.

That is not the most expensive part of Medicaid. The most expensive part in my State and across the Nation is the fact that Medicaid is there to help your mother or grandmother or your dad or your grandfather when they are in a situation in life where they need a helping hand. They may be in an assisted care facility, and the Social Security check is not enough; Medicare is not enough. Medicaid steps in to make sure they have the quality of care they need. Are we going to eliminate that kind of protection?

Ask disabled people and ask the organizations that represent them what it means to have a good strong Medicaid system. These people rely on Medicaid for maintaining their health through disability, day in and day out.

So when the Republicans propose an \$840 billion cut in Medicaid protection across America over 10 years, sadly, they are setting out on a path that could compromise the basic care we

need for babies and new moms, for the elderly in assisted care facilities and nursing facilities, and for the disabled who live in our States. We don't want to see that happen.

It is interesting that my Republican Governor in the State of Illinois seldom comments on Federal legislation. He came out in opposition to the bill that passed the House of Representatives. He said that this is a significantly bad bill for the State of Illinois, and I agree with him. I am glad he spoke up. I don't know how the seven Republican Congressmen who voted for it in my State can ignore that reality. Our Governor—our Republican Governor—believes it is bad for our State in cutting back Medicaid. The hospitals believe it is bad for our State in the impact that it will have on down-State hospitals. Doctors, nurses, and pediatricians also oppose it.

What can we do? What should we do? First, we ought to try to see what we can do to make the Affordable Care Act work better. We can do that on a bipartisan basis. We want to make sure, as the Senator from Kentucky said earlier, that there are available health insurance programs in every county of every State. Certainly, one thing we can do is make sure that a public option is there for everyone if they choose it—something that looks like Medicare.

People respect Medicare. Medicare is a great program for millions of Americans who are seniors and disabled. Why wouldn't we create a program like Medicare—a not-for-profit, government-operated program like Medicare for people who wish to have it? Those who don't can stick with private insurance if that is their choice, but I believe more and more people will move toward the Medicare option. That is something I would like to put on the table in reforming the Affordable Care Act.

Secondly, we need to address the cost of pharmaceutical drugs in America. The costs are out of control.

This week I received a publication from the AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons, and they are talking about what is happening to pharmaceutical prices across America. You don't have to tell seniors or those who buy prescription drugs what the reality happens to be.

Let me give you a few numbers to demonstrate why we need to have a new program to make sure drug prices don't go out of control. According to AARP, Americans spent \$457 billion on prescription drugs in 2015, up about 8 percent over the previous year—\$457 billion. The rise in prices for the most popular brand name drugs from 2008 to 2016 is over 200 percent. They have more than doubled in that 8-year period of time for the most popular drugs.

The median salary of a pharmaceutical firm's CEO in 2015 was \$14.5 million, more than any other industry; \$6.4 billion is the amount drug compa-

nies spend advertising directly to consumers in the U.S. annually; \$24 billion is the amount drug companies spend per year marketing to doctors. We are one of only two nations in the world that allows direct consumer advertising. Think about what that means.

When you see all these ads on television for drugs with names you can't pronounce, why are they doing it? It is because the drug companies know that consumers across America will write down the name of the drug and go ask the doctor to prescribe it. Many times, the doctor, rather than debate the issue with the patient or suggest they don't need it or should use a generic, will just write out the prescription. What happens? More expensive drugs get into the system, raising the cost of healthcare, raising the cost of premiums for health insurance. It doesn't make us healthier; it just means healthcare is more expensive.

I love to listen to the warnings on these drugs that go on and on and on. One of my favorites was this: Be sure and tell your doctor if you have had a liver transplant. I am thinking to myself, yeah, I think I would probably mention that somewhere along the way to a doctor.

These warnings should give us fair warning that this is inflating the cost of healthcare across America. It is not making us healthier, and it is running up profits dramatically for pharmaceutical companies. Why is it that exactly the same drugs made in the United States sell for a fraction of their cost in America in places like Canada and Europe? It is a legitimate question. We ought to address it. Do we have the political nerve to do it? I hope so, as part of the Affordable Care Act reform. I hope we sit down and do something on a bipartisan basis to deal with the challenges we face, but first, take repeal off the table.

Let's make the Affordable Care Act stronger. Let's do it on a bipartisan basis. Let's set out to come up with a solution that doesn't do what the House version did, which could eliminate health insurance for millions of people across America and a million people in my State of Illinois.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

PRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH RUSSIAN OFFICIALS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, by now we have all had the chance to read the report in the Washington Post that alleges stunning behavior on the part of the President in a meeting with the Russian Ambassador and Russian Foreign Minister.

According to the report, the President revealed classified information about a terrorist threat to officials of a foreign government. The President didn't share it with just any government; the report states he shared it with the Russian Government, a global adversary that has violated the sovereignty of peaceful nations, propped

up dictators and human rights abusers, including Iran and Syria, and has been widely proven to have interfered in our elections and the elections of our allies in Europe.

If this report is indeed true, it would mean that the President may have badly damaged our national security, nothing less, and in several ways. First, the act of a disclosure of this type could threaten the United States' relationships with allies that provide us with vital intelligence and could result in the loss of this specific intelligence source.

We rely on intelligence from our allies to keep America safe. America can't have eyes and ears everywhere. If our allies abroad can't trust us to keep sensitive information close to the vest, they may no longer share it with us. That undermines key relationships and, even more importantly, makes us less safe.

Second, if accurate, such a disclosure could damage our interests in the Middle East. We do not collaborate with Russia in Syria or elsewhere in the Middle East for the simple fact that we have diverging interests. Russia, for example, has worked with Iran to prop up the brutal Assad regime. Sharing vital intelligence with Russian officials could allow the Russians to pursue or even possibly eliminate the source or figure out how the ally conducts operations, including any against Russia or Russia's allies in the region.

Third, if the report is true, the President's alleged carelessness with classified information will further damage the relationship between the White House and the intelligence community—an essential relationship for the security of America. The intelligence community needs to be able to trust the President and trust that he will treat classified information with caution and with care. Our intelligence professionals put their lives on the line every day to acquire information that is critical to our national security and critical to keeping Americans safe. They have done a very good job.

If the reporting is accurate, in one fell swoop, the President could have unsettled our allies, emboldened our adversaries, endangered our military and intelligence officers the world over, and exposed our Nation to greater risk.

Given the gravity of the matter, we need to be able to quickly assess whether this report is true and what exactly was said. So I am calling on the White House to make the transcript of the meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister and Ambassador available to the congressional Intelligence Committees as soon as possible. The White House should make the transcript of the meeting available immediately to the congressional Intelligence Committees. If the President has nothing to hide, he should direct that the transcript of the meeting be made available.

The Members who sit on those committees have the necessary clearances

to review the transcript and any related summary of the President's meeting with the Russians. I agree with the senior Senator from Maine that this briefing should happen immediately. Those committees would be able to help establish the facts before we grapple with the potential consequences.

Last night, the administration issued several overlapping denials. Some questioned the overall veracity of the account. Some took pains to specifically deny certain accusations but not others. This morning, the President tweeted a version of events that undercut his advisers' carefully worded denials and seems to confirm the reports that he had shared the information in question.

Following so closely after Mr. Comey's firing, which was rationalized to the press and the American public in several different ways over the course of a week, this administration now faces a crisis of credibility. The President has told us that we cannot take at face value the explanations of some of his key advisers, but the events of the past week have taken this to an untenable extreme. The timelines and rationales in the administration contradict one another. The truth, as it were, sits atop shifting sands in this administration.

We need the transcripts to see exactly what the President said, given the conflicting reports from the people in the room. Producing the transcripts is the only way for this administration to categorically prove the reports untrue.

Mr. President, there is a crisis of credibility in this administration which will hurt us in ways almost too numerous to elaborate. At the top of the list is an erosion of trust in the Presidency and trust in America by our friends and allies. The President owes the intelligence community, the American people, and the Congress a full explanation. The transcripts, in my view, are a necessary first step. Until the administration provides the unedited transcript, until the administration fully explains the facts of this case, the American people will rightly doubt if their President can handle our Nation's most closely kept secrets.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

#### NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I noted yesterday that this week we celebrate National Police Week. In particular, we recognize and remember those law enforcement officers who have paid the ultimate price and sacrificed their lives to protect the communities in which they serve. Yesterday, I had the chance to speak about Javier Vega, Jr., a Border Patrol agent who served in South Texas and was tragically killed by two illegal immigrant criminals.

Today, I want to talk about the attack on law enforcement officers in Dallas almost a year ago. Last July, about 800 people gathered in downtown

Dallas for a peaceful march. Given the size of the event, dozens of law enforcement officers were on hand to protect the protesters so they could exercise their fundamental constitutional right. Before 9 p.m., the event had been going very well, by any standard. There wasn't any violence reported in the crowd, even though some similar events across the country hadn't been as calm. But in Dallas, it was clear that there existed a mutual respect between the citizens protesting and law enforcement. There were even social media posts of protesters embracing police officers in a show of solidarity and friendship.

Unfortunately, the night would soon be robbed of any enduring image of that sort of positive scene. A man—someone who came that night explicitly to target law enforcement officers—opened fire, killing five officers and wounding seven more—the deadliest day for American law enforcement since 9/11. The officers who lost their lives that day—Breton Thompson, Patrick Zamarippa, Lorne Aherns, Michael Krol, and Michael Smith—will not be forgotten. They, like the other officers on duty that night—many of whom were injured by the gunmen—didn't look the other way or run the other way when the violence erupted. Like the heroes they are, they ran to the danger, not away from the gunshots and the uproar. They, like law enforcement officers across the country, weren't about to shy away from doing their job, even if that meant putting their own lives on the line.

So today, I want to commend the men and women of the Dallas police force, a group of men and women with incredible courage and unflinching valor in the face of danger. This Police Week I am particularly grateful to them and to the officers and first responders all over the State of Texas and all around our Nation who count the costs and choose to serve their communities day after day, often with little thanks or recognition.

As I said last summer, it shouldn't take an event of this scale to jolt our consciences into action. As legislators, we have tremendous opportunities to better support our men and women in blue who risk their lives to protect ours. We have a duty to do all we can to keep them safe and to keep our society safe and peaceful. So as we celebrate Police Week, I hope we can each do our part to better support the men and women serving in law enforcement.

Later today, Mr. President, I plan to introduce a piece of legislation called the Back the Blue Act, along with Senator CRUZ and Senator TILLIS. This is legislation that makes clear our support for these public servants who spend their lives protecting us and serving us. The Back the Blue Act would create a new Federal crime for killing or attempting to kill a Federal judge, a law enforcement officer, or a federally funded public safety officer.