

would you enter into a contract with a State or Federal-based exchange? So whether it is the attack on the individual mandate, whether it is the decision to pull advertising, or whether it is the games being played with cost-sharing reduction payments, there is a coordinated effort inside the White House today to destroy the American healthcare system to the extent that much of the system has the Affordable Care Act at its foundation.

President Trump was pretty clear about this the day of the failure of the first healthcare bill in the House of Representatives. He essentially telegraphed that he was going to try to undermine the Affordable Care Act as punishment to Democrats, and that if he hurt enough people, eventually Democrats would come to the table and negotiate with him. Well, I have a message for the President of the United States: That is not how it is going to work. You are not going to blackmail Democrats by hurting our constituents by undermining the Affordable Care Act.

We want to be part of this discussion about improving the healthcare system. We do. We want to work with Republicans. It will be a much smaller and likely less revolutionary bill than Republicans are considering today, but it will have both party's fingerprints on it. We are not going to be part of a bill that strips healthcare away from tens of millions of Americans, and we cannot support this administration while it seeks to undermine the Affordable Care Act on a daily basis.

If these exchanges fail—I don't think they will, but if the exchanges fail—or if rates go up, there is only one place to put the blame—on an administration that is actively, regularly, and on a daily basis trying to sabotage the Affordable Care Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are not. We are on the Brand nomination.

THE INTERNET

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I rise today to point out that the Federal Communications Commission is voting today, perhaps this morning, to begin the process to roll back a regulatory framework that should never have been imposed on broadband service providers in the first place. Like many of my colleagues, I am glad the FCC is working to restore the "light touch" regulatory framework that has allowed the internet to thrive since its creation.

This action sets the stage for Congress to then put a legislative solution in place that strikes the right balance between providing regulatory oversight on the one hand and giving the broadband industry the flexibility it needs to innovate and expand on the other hand.

We should not rely on a classification that was devised during the depression

era. There should be 21st-century rules for 21st-century technology. As chairman of the Senate subcommittee that oversees internet issues, I look forward to the task ahead. Keeping the internet free and open is a goal shared by most of us and by many of my friends on the other side of the aisle. A bipartisan solution can help provide long-term certainty for both consumers and broadband providers.

This certainty will be essential to our efforts to close the digital divide and remove barriers to internet connectivity that exist in Mississippi and around the United States. The online experience we enjoy today and the revolutionary advances of the internet over the past quarter century did not happen because of the heavy hand of the Federal Government.

These advances happened because the Federal Government stayed out of the way, supporting a "light touch" regulatory framework where innovation, competition, and investment could truly survive and thrive.

This was the framework that existed under both Republican and Democratic administrations until 2015, when politics got in the way. With a party-line vote, the FCC that year decided to adopt a utility-style framework, as I said, resulting from legislation devised during the depression. It classified broadband service as a common carrier under title II of the Communications Act of 1934.

A utility-style framework for telephones may have worked during the Bell telephone monopoly of the depression era, but that does not mean it is a right fit now. Nor does it mean we should adopt a completely hands off regulatory approach, which I would also oppose. The goal of net neutrality, which is designed to prevent internet providers from prioritizing some legal content over others has not gone away. But we know that handing over broad control of the internet to Washington is also not the answer.

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai has outlined some of the reasons for this, including the impact of title II regulations on big and small internet service providers. If we do not give providers the confidence to invest in better services and better infrastructure, it could limit consumers' options and services. This could also affect our efforts to close the digital divide, to bring the digital world to our rural communities in Alabama and Mississippi. Underserved communities could remain underserved.

Without broadband access, these communities could lose out on critical jobs, economic development, and many other opportunities borne out of the thriving internet economy.

At the end of the day, we need to be asking: What do Americans want and what do Americans need? They need broadband that is accessible, affordable, fast, and reliable. They want to be able to choose the services and content that best meets their needs.

These are the priorities that need to be kept in mind as the FCC works today and as lawmakers work to strike a balance between regulatory oversight and free market productivity.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL CARSON

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

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, every week I have been coming to the Senate floor to talk about someone in my great State of Alaska who makes Alaska a better place for all of us—for the community, for everybody living there. I call this person our Alaskan of the Week. To be honest, it is one of the most fulfilling things I get to do as a Senator, recognizing back home and across the country special people in my State.

There is no doubt that many here in the Chamber and the people who are watching from home have seen pictures and television shows about Alaska. We are a little biased—I know one of our pages is an Alaskan—that we have the most beautiful State, not only in the country but in the world. So we want to encourage everybody watching to come visit Alaska. It will be the trip of a lifetime, absolutely guaranteed. It is truly the people of Alaska who make our State so special, people with big hearts who band together to solve challenges. Like all places, we have challenges.

This week I would like to recognize Michael Carson for his work to help people in Alaska who are struggling with addiction. We know this is a problem that is impacting every single State in our great Nation. Michael lives in Palmer, AK, a picturesque town about 45 miles from Anchorage in Alaska's vast Matanuska-Susitna Valley—what we just call the Valley or the Mat-Su. It is about the size of West Virginia, so don't get me going on the size of Alaska. It will embarrass most of my—actually all of my colleagues here, unfortunately for them. Palmer is flanked by the rolling Talkeetna Mountains to the north and the saw-toothed Chugach Mountains to the south. It is a close-knit community where most people know each other.

Many people in Palmer and the Mat-Su across the State know Michael Carson's name. Like many Alaskans, Michael's story is one full of adventure. Originally from California, he received his undergraduate in early childhood development from the University of Texas. After hitchhiking through Africa and spending a summer in Mexico, he took a job teaching in Nome, AK, in 1974. A few years later, he moved to the Mat-Su to teach and taught our students for many years.

He retired from teaching, but his yearning to help people, particularly our youth, did not leave him. He got a job at Covenant House in Anchorage, which is a homeless youth shelter. It is a wonderful place, by the way. I am a little biased on this one; my wife Julie happens to work at Covenant House. Michael's shift started at 8 p.m. and ended at 8 a.m. That is what he was doing at Covenant House. He spent those hours walking through the city, reaching out to kids on the streets, sharing his own story, and inspiring our youth because his story also involves recovery. It is a privilege to say here on the Senate floor that Mike has been sober for 29 years.

Eventually realizing that kids in the Mat-Su Valley also needed a place to go when they were in trouble and needed help, Michael and another incredible constituent of mine, Michelle Overstreet, founded MYHouse in Palmer, a place that provides services like job assistance, access to healthcare, clothing, food, and showers for homeless youth. Michael still sits on the board, still remains a champion for all youth, particularly those in recovery and the homeless or disadvantaged. He leads recovery groups on-site weekly, as well as meetings with clients who are struggling. He has also volunteered to host recovery groups at the Mat-Su youth detention facility for the past 13 years. Michael has helped many young people get sober and stay sober.

In Michelle Overstreet's words, it is not uncommon for youth to come into the drop-in center, homeless and just out of juvenile detention, and ask specifically for Michael, to come in and say that he helped them somewhere along their journey through life to sobriety, just to come in and say: Thank you, Michael.

Most of us know that our country is in the midst of an opioid crisis, one that has become an epidemic in many places across the country. In 2015, more people in America died from overdoses—over 52,000, and most were linked to opioids and heroin—than car crashes or gun violence.

On Wednesday morning, Alaskans awoke to a disturbing headline in the Alaska Dispatch News: "Anchorage is seeing a dramatic surge in heroin overdoses." Anchorage is the largest city in Alaska. It is my hometown. The article said that since May 1, there have been more than 2 overdoses a day in Anchorage—34 overdoses in just a little more than 2 weeks.

Like almost every State in this great Nation of ours, Alaska is being hit hard by the opioid crisis, and we are trying to focus as much attention as we can in a bipartisan fashion on addressing this crisis, whether in Alaska, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Indiana, or Vermont.

We need people like Michael. Every State does. He started the only grassroots opioid task force in the State of Alaska and continues to chair that effort to this day. He knows too well how the abuse of opioids, other drugs, and

alcohol robs our citizens—but particularly our youth—of their lives, promise, and future. He also understands how very important it is to have resources for those who need the support and recovery. Those resources come in many forms. We have been trying in the Congress in the last year, year and a half, to bring significant resources to our State and local communities. We are doing that.

State support is also important across the country. Perhaps most important is the community support and having people like Michael on the frontlines who understand that addiction is not a moral failure and that people who are suffering need help. They need help, not moral judgments from us.

Because of Michael's involvement and the involvement of so many others in Alaska and particularly in the Mat-Su, there are places for people who are suffering to call and get help. There are places to go and heal and places where our youth can have leaders who listen to them, like Michael.

Michael says it is vital for his own recovery to continue to help people who are suffering from addiction. He calls it "survivor obligation." I call it the work of angels.

Michael, thanks for all you do, and congratulations on being our Alaskan of the week.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The Senator from South Dakota.

THE INTERNET

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the internet worked great in 2014 when there were no Federal net neutrality rules. Truth be told, even after the Obama-era Federal Communications Commission applied depression-era phone monopoly regulations to broadband in 2015, most Americans saw little or no difference in their internet experience. The internet still creates jobs, expands educational opportunities, keeps us in touch with loved ones, and, as a bonus, it is often entertaining.

This internet that we know and love isn't going to fall apart anytime soon, no matter what the FCC decides. But there are important policy questions that need to be answered about how the internet will grow and develop into the future. Let's put the apocalyptic rhetoric and fearmongering aside.

The internet doesn't belong just to Republicans, Democrats, big Silicon Valley tech companies, internet service providers, small Silicon Prairie startups, or the Federal Government. It belongs to everyone. It is global. It is best when it is free and open.

Today, as the FCC reconsiders the flawed broadband regulations it issued only 2 years ago, Congress should look back at the path that we could have taken but didn't. In November of 2014, I offered former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler an opportunity for Democrats and Republicans to come together to craft a permanent legislative solution

banning controversial practices known as blocking, throttling, and paid prioritization of internet traffic. With colleagues in the House of Representatives, I even put forward a draft bill doing exactly that. It wasn't a final offer but, rather, an outreach to get the conversation started. I thought the time and opportunity to protect the open internet on a bipartisan basis had arrived. Through bipartisan legislation, I believed Congress should put into statute widely accepted principles of network management, commonly referred to as "net neutrality."

Our idea for legislation was straightforward: Combine protections ensuring that owners of broadband infrastructure can't use their role to manipulate the user experience with those guaranteeing a continuation of the light-touch regulatory policies that helped the internet thrive for two decades.

But Chairman Wheeler rejected our idea for bipartisan legislation. Instead, he and his staff lobbied to block such discussions from even happening in Congress. He then, with only partisan support, issued an order that gave the FCC authority to regulate the internet under old laws designed for phone monopolies and eliminated all the authority the Federal Trade Commission had to police broadband providers.

I represent South Dakota, a rural State that is home to small but still very innovative technology businesses. In other parts of the State, communities lack access to high-speed broadband. In the debate over the FCC regulating broadband with rules designed for phone monopolies, there were many concerns that Chairman Wheeler's approach would create uncertainty that chills investment.

"Chilling investment" is a term that one often hears among the business community. To me, what it really means is that many Americans in rural communities will have to wait longer before they have an opportunity to select high-speed internet service. Today there are 34 million Americans who lack access to broadband services at home.

As innovation on the internet thrives, demand for data rises, and the stock market hits all-time highs, one would have suspected that broadband investment would continue growing as it had for two decades. But according to one analysis, annual investment actually went down 5.5 percent in 2016 compared to 2014. This is a troubling sign that private investment may have second thoughts about the ability to turn capital expenditures into future profits under an excessive regulatory regime.

Chairman Wheeler assured the public that his FCC would not use new authority over the internet to aggressively restrict many regular online practices, but he could not offer assurances that, as years pass and administrations change, such regulatory restraint would remain. His order gives wide legal latitude for any future FCC