

here in the Senate, just as the last budget was. Democrats and Republicans, on the 2017 budget, virtually ignored the President and his proposal. We got together, and we compromised. Not everyone got everything they wanted, but we produced a budget that America can be proud of and one that helps the middle class.

We have shown Democrats and Republicans, the House and Senate, can come together to compromise on appropriations in 2017. We should follow that same blueprint in 2018. We should ignore the President's budget which would devastate the middle class and instead work across the aisle to advance reasonable compromise legislation later this year.

I yield the floor to my good friend from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I came to the floor during the last part of the remarks of the distinguished Democratic leader, and it just reminded me of a headline I saw in this morning's newspaper that just, to me, exemplifies how dishonest, sometimes, the way questions are framed here when it comes to dealing with our financial responsibilities. The headline in the Washington Post talked about President Trump's proposal slashing Medicaid, like the Democrats have criticized the House healthcare replacement bill slashing Medicaid even though, as a factual matter, Medicaid would continue to grow year after year after year.

As the distinguished Presiding Officer and I have previously discussed, one question is, What is a responsible rate of Consumer Price Index or inflation to deal with medical inflation so that when we return Medicaid to the States, spending at let's say 2016 levels, what is a responsible rate of continued growth to deal with medical inflation so that the States are not left with an unsustainable burden?

But the idea that spending at current levels, plus an additional cost-of-living index year after year after year, means that Medicaid spending won't go up every year—next year it will be more than this year. The following year it will be more than next year. So only in the fevered imagination of, apparently, the headline writers at the Washington Post and in some of our Democratic friends could that be considered a cut. In the rest of the country, they would consider that as Medicaid growing, not being cut.

It is true that one of the things the House did that I think is an important reform of one of our principle entitlement provisions was to put some sort of sustainable cap on the growth of spending on entitlements, which previously had been uncapped.

Some day there is going to be a day of reckoning in this country when it comes to spending. We have \$20 trillion in debt. We know now that the Federal Reserve is loosening its hold on inter-

est rates, that those are creeping up, and one of the estimates is that if interest rates due to improved economic performance were to reach historic norms, we would soon be paying more for interest on the national debt than we would be paying for defense spending. That is simply unsustainable, not to mention the fact that we would then be essentially appropriating 30 percent of what the Federal Government spends and leaving 70 percent untouched.

We can't get the country on a sustainable financial path just dealing with 30 percent of what the Federal Government spends, and we need to have a serious conversation, not a misleading characterization of the problem. We need a serious conversation about the reality facing our country and future generations because right now we are spending their inheritance, so to speak. In other words, I consider it an act of immorality for me to be spending money and forcing my children and future generations to pay it back. That is just not fair to them, and we need to come to grips with that sooner rather than later.

NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. President, on another note, last week, the administration sent official notice to Congress of its intent to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA. It was a big part of President Trump's campaign platform that the United States needed smarter, fairer trade deals that benefit more Americans. I certainly agree with that principle.

I do think, in some quarters, NAFTA has been unfairly maligned. But it is true that it is 23 years old, and it needs to be modernized. I think all of us can rally around that, consistent with the principle in President Trump's campaign that America needs smarter, fairer trade deals that benefit more Americans.

Free trade has, after all, been a boon to the American economy—and certainly the Texas economy because we are the No. 1 exporting State in the Nation. Our farmers, ranchers, and small business owners have benefited from trade agreements, particularly NAFTA, that help them send more of the products they raise, grow, and build to more markets around the world, principally to Canada and Mexico; but certainly, other trade agreements allow those manufactured goods, stock raised, and produce grown to go to markets around the world.

We comprise in America about 5 percent of the potential markets in the world, so 95 percent is the rest of the world and a market to buy the things we make and grow and raise here. Why not help create more jobs and a stronger economy here at home by encouraging that kind of free and fair trade?

There has been significant growth in exports since NAFTA was agreed to 23 years ago. Of course, Mexico continues to be an important economic partner, helping my State, Texas, grow and spe-

cifically creating a vibrant ecosystem along the border, but the rest of the country benefits too.

The national Chamber of Commerce estimates that there are 5 million American jobs as a result of binational trade with Mexico. With Canada, it is about 8 million. Why in the world would we want to do anything to jeopardize that? I suggest we don't.

Free trade doesn't just mean more opportunities for our agricultural sector or business owners, but it also helps American families buy more affordable products here at home, too, and that is why we need to make sure that any changes to NAFTA are improvements to the overall agreement.

I was encouraged just this last week when Ambassador Lighthizer, the U.S. Trade Representative, and Secretary of Commerce Ross met with members of the Senate Finance Committee. Essentially, what they said is that their first principle, when it comes to renegotiating NAFTA, is to do no harm. That is a pretty good rule of thumb. In fact, it reminds me of the Hippocratic Oath that doctors take when treating patients: First, do no harm. Well, I believe that is a good place to start.

Over the last two decades under this agreement, the economy in my State of Texas—which has been the engine that has been pulling the national economy in many respects—has grown significantly because of the tremendous access afforded by trade. We have to be careful not to do any harm to that and to look for ways to improve it.

There is no denying that this agreement is an old one created well before the digital and global economy of today. It was written before the energy renaissance in North America occurred, whereby instead of peak energy production—which is what we thought we had reached—we now have so much natural gas and oil that we export it to the world. That is great for jobs here at home. It is great to be able to do that for our allies around the world who need a dependable, alternative supply of energy in many respects, rather than being the victims of energy being used as a weapon against them. So the energy renaissance is another good reason that updating NAFTA makes sense.

I look forward to working with the President and his team to take great care that any efforts to modernize NAFTA don't sacrifice the benefits we have enjoyed for the last two decades. Hopefully, we can modernize it in a way that will allow more Americans to take advantage of it, and our economy will continue to grow and prosper as a result.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. President, on another matter, as we all know, this Chamber continues to consider the best way forward to repeal and replace ObamaCare. The entire Republican Conference, all 52 of us, have been meeting regularly in small groups and larger groups so we can finally put ObamaCare behind us. I have to say it is a shame that none of our Democratic

colleagues appear willing to lift a finger to help us do that, even though they know that ObamaCare is in melt-down mode.

We have promised multiple times, at least in the last three elections, to do away with this disaster of a healthcare law so that American families can get the healthcare they need at a price they can afford. This isn't just a talking point. This is our goal. This is our objective.

When I said that ObamaCare has been a failure, I am reminded of a letter written to me by one of my constituents from the Dallas-Fort Worth area. This gentleman is a small business owner. Since the implementation of ObamaCare, he has had to change his insurance each year, and every time, his rates have increased. He estimates they had gone up from roughly \$350 a month now to \$800 a month, not to mention his out-of-pocket costs. They have skyrocketed from \$3,500 to \$14,000. That is not affordable healthcare. At that price, I can't imagine it does him much good at all, particularly when you couple those high premiums with higher deductibles, in many instances \$6,000 or more for the deductible alone. So even though you are paying premiums for insurance and those premiums are going up every year, you still have such a high deductible that it effectively makes you self-insured, and you don't benefit from the insurance you actually have.

The first time this gentleman was forced to change his healthcare plan was because his insurance carrier completely pulled out of the marketplace, and that is something we are hearing across the country. It is not just a Texas phenomenon. I imagine there are similar stories in States like Indiana, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Michigan, and Montana, just to mention a few. It is simply proof that the ObamaCare experiment is a failure, and the government-mandated, one-size-fits-all approach to healthcare doesn't work very well.

The next year, this same gentleman went with a different insurance company, but they canceled the plan he was already on. Then that insurance company pulled all individual healthcare plans from the State, so he had to find another health insurance plan.

That is not where the bad news ends. The doctor he has had for 20 years didn't accept the new health insurance plan, so instead of finding a new doctor, which he didn't want to do, he is now paying out of pocket so that he can keep the doctor he wants.

Remember what President Obama said countless times: If you like your plan, you can keep it. If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor. He said that a family of four would find, on average, a savings of \$2,500 a year in their health insurance premiums. None of that has proved to be true. This is an experiment that has ended in failure. It didn't turn out to be the case for this

constituent of mine; each time his plan changed, he saw a price increase and a coverage decrease.

Even if Hillary Clinton had been elected President of the United States, we would still need to revisit the failures of ObamaCare because the situation is simply not sustainable for roughly about 11 million people—about 6 percent of the people who get their insurance in the individual market.

In spite of knowing that many of their constituents are being hurt by the failures of ObamaCare, our Democratic colleagues—even though they know it—refuse to do anything about it. Again, we invite them to work with us, not for our benefit but for the benefit of the people they represent.

This is not making life any easier for my constituents in Texas, and I am confident that is the case for people across the country. That is why our efforts to replace ObamaCare are so important, and that is why we will keep fighting to get it done because families across the country need access to quality healthcare they can afford that is not chosen for them but is what they choose because it suits their needs.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all quorum calls until 5:30 p.m. today be equally divided.

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

Mr. CORNYN. I yield the floor.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, last week, we confirmed two well-qualified nominees, Jeffrey Rosen as Deputy Secretary of Transportation and Rachel Brand as Associate Attorney General, and today we will have an opportunity to confirm another excellent nominee, Gov. Terry Branstad to be U.S. Ambassador to China.

While I am pleased the Senate is working to fill these important positions, it has been disappointing to see so much pointless obstruction by our friends across the aisle. They have continuously forced procedural hurdles on nominees for no other reason than to stall confirmations, launching more filibusters against this President's Cabinet than any other in history. They have done so not to change the result but simply to eat up floor time that could be used for legislation to help our constituents.

Take the floor vote they forced last week on the Branstad nomination. The Senate voted overwhelmingly, 86 to 12, on that motion, proving once again that our Democratic colleagues' tactics have little to do with the nominees themselves but are just delaying for

delay's sake. It is really past time to stop the games.

Once confirmed as Ambassador to China, Governor Branstad will be tasked with a portfolio that is important not only for our diplomatic relationship with China but also for our trade policies with that country. He has earned the support of Senators on both sides of the aisle and was reported out of the Foreign Relations Committee by a voice vote.

Having served as the Governor of Iowa for more than two decades, Branstad has developed a strong understanding of agriculture, trade, and other key national interests. His experience on these issues will guide him as he works to strengthen our relationship with China and pursue trade policies that can benefit American workers and businesses. I look forward to confirming him as our Nation's next Ambassador to China so he can get started on the important tasks before him.

NOMINATION OF JOHN SULLIVAN

Mr. President, after we confirm Governor Branstad, we will vote to advance another well-qualified nominee to serve as our Nation's Deputy Secretary of State, John J. Sullivan. It is both a critical and challenging role, but Mr. Sullivan's extensive background has prepared him for the task ahead. Through the years, he has worked at the Defense Department and the Justice Department. He also served as the Deputy Secretary of Commerce. I am confident that his experience will serve him well as he works as a key adviser to Secretary Tillerson and helps lead our Nation in addressing the range of security issues we face. We look forward to confirming him soon.

Having these key officials in place at the State Department is of great importance as we work with the administration on shaping our foreign policy and strengthening our posture in the international community.

THE PRESIDENT'S INTERNATIONAL TRIP

As we know, the President is currently traveling on his first international trip as our Commander in Chief. The trip provides the President with an important opportunity to engage with key allies, discuss our shared interests, and continue conversations on issues where we can work together in the future. So we wish the President and the First Lady both a successful trip and safe travels as they return to the United States later this week.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all quorum calls until 5:30 p.m. today be equally divided.

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

The Senator from Arkansas.

NATIONAL DRUG COURT MONTH

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise to recognize National Drug Court Month and show my support for the positive impact drug courts have on cutting crime, saving money, and restoring lives.

I have seen firsthand the impact of drug courts in Arkansas. This proven