

of bed, getting dressed, and brushing my hair can tire me out for hours. I could go on and on with a long list of other horrible symptoms.

My illness began to affect my job as a Property & Casualty Insurance Agent. I started missing more and more time from work, first due to doctor appointments and then due to the worsening of my symptoms. Eventually, I was forced to file a claim for long-term disability insurance. I had been undergoing multiple tests and examinations and I thought the physicians would soon determine what was wrong and prescribe the appropriate treatment so I could get back my life and get back to work.

That never happened. During this time I had physical therapy and after a couple of weeks of treatment I was able to move my neck again. But by August, I was diagnosed with Systemic Lupus, Systemic Sclerosis, Osteoarthritis and Severe Spinal Stenosis among other related conditions. Although my employer assured me they had my back, in October, I received a certified letter from an attorney advising me that my employment had been terminated.

As a result, I lost my healthcare coverage and was offered COBRA coverage for a period of only three months.

On February 1, 2017, I became one of millions who rely on the Affordable Care Act (ACA). I was already familiar with the ACA because my husband had been covered by it since 2012.

My husband works for a small business that doesn't offer health insurance. The ACA was about \$350 less than for him to be added to my former employer's plan. Some of you may be thinking after hearing about some of my conditions that they aren't life ending but you would be wrong.

I suffer from autoimmune diseases. My immune system attacks my own body instead of resisting hostile foreign invaders. So my immune system will not fight off but will actually help the bad things to spread and become even stronger.

In approximately 50 percent of people with Systemic Lupus a major organ or tissue in the body such as the heart, lungs, kidneys or brain will become affected.

Between 10 and 15 percent of Lupus patients will die prematurely. However, it is widely believed that number is substantially underreported. Many deaths are reported as a result of the complications such as kidney failure and not the Lupus itself.

1 in 3 patients with Lupus also have another autoimmune disease. I fall into that category having been diagnosed with Systemic Sclerosis as well. Systemic Sclerosis can also involve the heart, kidneys, lungs, liver and brain. Internal organ complications are common and are often not symptomatic until the late stages of disease, thus routine screening is essential. Lung involvement is the leading cause of death.

She shared her story and much more with me at a townhall in Martinsburg. She asked me to read this on the Senate floor. She asked me to share her story because she has tried to share it with all of the elected officials herself, not just for herself but also for the protected 24 million Americans who are at risk of losing their insurance if the Affordable Care Act is repealed and replaced with the American Health Care Act, the act that was just passed in the House which is being sent to the Senate.

So she is asking us: Please, do not pass this. Do not repeal the ACA but fix it. We all know it needs to be re-

paired. The private market needs to be fixed, not to mention those who will no longer be able to afford it with the premiums going up, especially for the older, poorer senior citizens.

I obviously have pre-existing conditions, no job, and my husband's job does not offer health insurance. In other words, without the ACA, I would not be able to get the insurance I need so badly. I also fear that based on numbers provided by the CBO, if insurance is still available to me, I won't be able to afford it and of course there is also my husband's insurance to worry about.

At the same time many young and healthy people chose to take a gamble believing like we all do when we're young that nothing bad is ever going to happen to us.

As a result, the ACA risk pool was not as diverse as it should have been. Robust participation is so critical to ensuring citizens have access to and a real choice in affordable coverage. Imagine if those that oppose the ACA actually got behind it for the good of the country.

The ACA even with all of its opposition helped millions and it appears that the American people realize this, even many that were originally fooled by the negative rhetoric have decided they want to keep it. Please do what is right for us the citizens that have chosen each of you to represent us.

As I pointed out earlier, many of those people have come around to a different way of thinking as of late and I wouldn't be so sure that they will be there for you the next time when they vote if you have taken away their health care or their parents, siblings, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, neighbors, friends, church members, coworkers, classmates, and so on. Of course we can't forget that a lot of those people will die as a result of not being able to keep their health care as well.

Putting your politics, egos, agendas, and parties aside in this case will actually save human lives. I ask you all not to repeal and replace the ACA and instead to work together to fix it and make improvements.

Please don't allow the CEOs of insurance companies and the wealthiest Americans to make even more money at the expense of those Americans who are the most vulnerable, like the disabled, the sick, the elderly and those with lower incomes.

I beg of you, PLEASE oppose the repeal of the ACA and please oppose any plan that could leave me and millions like me without health insurance or that will increase our premiums or deductibles or reduce or eliminate any current coverage. Our lives are depending on it and we are depending on you.

So, as I have promised, I have read this letter, Stephanie's story. I am hoping that Stephanie is listening and watching, but also for all the people that she represents—people who have serious illnesses, who are going to be left out or who are afraid they are going to be left out, elderly people who are going to not be able to afford insurance.

There are a lot of things that we can do, but one thing that we can all be doing is working together as Republicans and Democrats and putting our country first and people in our States and fixing this. We know it needs to be fixed. Get off the political rhetoric and quit blaming each other and sit down and say: OK, this needs to be repaired. This private market doesn't work the way it was intended to.

We need to get more young people involved. We need the market forces to

work. We need for everyone who has insurance for the first time to use it in the most efficient, effective, and appropriate way. There is a lot that can be done, but not just by taking political votes and holding each other in harm's way.

I thank you for allowing me to tell Stephanie's story. I hope it helps. I can't wait to sit down and start working with all of our colleagues in this body.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

AUTHORIZING TESTIMONY, DOCUMENT PRODUCTION, AND REPRESENTATION

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the preamble to S. Res. 178 be agreed to.

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

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, previously agreed to, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

SECURING OUR AGRICULTURE AND FOOD ACT

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 1238 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

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

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1238) to amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to make the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for Health Affairs responsible for coordinating the efforts of the Department of Homeland Security related to food, agriculture, and veterinary defense against terrorism, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SULLIVAN. I ask unanimous consent that the Roberts amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to, the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The amendment (No. 217) was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To preserve the authority of the Secretaries of Agriculture and Health and Human Services and make a technical correction)

On page 4, lines 1 and 2, strike "relating to food and agriculture" and insert "or the Secretary of Health and Human Services".

On page 4, strike line 3 and all that follows through the end of the matter following line 6 and insert the following:

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of contents in section 1(b) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 is amended—

(1) by striking the items relating to sections 523, 524, 525, 526, and 527; and

(2) by inserting after the item relating to section 522 the following:

“Sec. 523. Guidance and recommendations.

“Sec. 524. Voluntary private sector preparedness accreditation and certification program.

“Sec. 525. Acceptance of gifts.

“Sec. 526. Integrated public alert and warning system modernization.

“Sec. 527. National planning and education.

“Sec. 528. Coordination of Department of Homeland Security efforts related to food, agriculture, and veterinary defense against terrorism.”

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

The bill (H.R. 1238), as amended, was passed.

NORTH KOREA

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I want to talk this evening about a very serious threat to the United States; that is, the threat from North Korea and what we in the Congress should be doing about it.

Now, over the weekend we saw another piece of news about how the North Korean regime is again testing missiles, testing for intercontinental ballistic missiles, more missile launches, literally two in the last 2 weeks.

I would say this is one of the most serious threats facing the United States of America right now because what has now become clear, it is no longer if Kim Jong Un and the North Korean regime will have the ability to range the United States of America with an intercontinental ballistic nuclear missile. It is no longer if. It is when.

This has been stated time and time again in open hearings we have had on the Armed Services Committee with generals and some of the top experts in the United States. It used to be, hey, maybe he would have this capability sometime down the road. Maybe he will never get it. They are not saying that any longer. Think about that. Every American should be thinking about that. It is no longer if but when one of the craziest dictators in the world will have the capability to launch an intercontinental ballistic nuclear missile. It is not just ranging my State, the great State of Alaska, which unfortunately for me and my constituents is in the line of fire earlier than other States or Hawaii, which faces similar risks to Alaska, but we are talking about the continental United States. We are talking about Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles. It is not if but when.

So yesterday in front of the Armed Services Committee, the Director of National Intelligence, our good friend,

former Senator Dan Coats, when I asked him and General Stewart, the top military officer for our intelligence agencies, when they thought this was going to happen—well, it is a classified number and it is a classified time. I actually think it should be unclassified, given their estimates, to let the American people know what is coming because it is probably a lot sooner, at least in the estimates, than most people think. So that is what we are facing right now, and people should be concerned about it.

Let me give you a little bit more on the facts of this. Kim Jong Un, the leader of North Korea, the unstable dictator of North Korea, has publicly stated it is his goal to develop a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile that can strike the continental United States. Now, let's just be clear. This is a man who starves his own citizens, sentences them by the tens of thousands to inhumane labor camps, and just a month ago allegedly assassinated his half-brother in a Malaysian airport with poison to kill him.

In fact, since assuming power just 5 years ago, as my next chart shows, Kim Jong Un has conducted more missile tests and twice as many nuclear tests as both his father and grandfather did in their 60 years of ruling over North Korea. Look at these numbers: That is the Kim Jong Un regime, Kim Jong Il, Kim Il Sung. So he is focused on this more than his father and grandfather were. As I mentioned, it seems almost daily there is another one of these missile tests or even nuclear tests.

Now, one of the things you see in the press sometimes is, well, some of these missile tests are failing. There have been failures, and there have been notable successes, such as the country's first intermediate range ballistic missile, its first submarine launch ballistic missile, its first solid fuel launch missile, and its ability to put satellites in space. This is actual progress. This is significant progress.

On the nuclear side, the country's fifth test—and Kim Jong Un's third—had an estimated yield in terms of its power of 15 to 20 kilotons, approximately the size of the nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima. While this yield was not as large as they were expecting, the test again on the nuclear side shows steady progress in their nuclear program and steady progress in their ballistic missile program.

So what does all this mean? Why is Kim Jong Un testing so often? Even though he fails, he is still learning. That is exactly what the commander of U.S. Strategic Command said last month during a Senate Armed Services hearing.

Gen. John Hyten stated: North Korea is going fast. Test, fail, test, fail, succeed. They are learning, and as you can see them learning, they are developing the capabilities for intercontinental ballistic missiles. That is how it works in the rocket business.

That is happening right now. That is happening right now. That is in the news right now.

Also in the news is what the United States has been doing to protect our allies from this and other threats. So let me give you an example. There has been a lot of news about the THAAD deployment, a missile defense system in South Korea deployed by the U.S. Army to protect our troops and South Korea's citizens, to protect our troops in Korea, protect our troops in Japan, and to protect our allies. Now, I am very supportive of this—very supportive of this.

The President is on his Middle East trip. He is going to Europe now. He mentioned just a few days ago maybe having a THAAD system in Saudi Arabia, an American system to help protect the Saudis from the Iranian missile threat. Again, I am very supportive.

As the Presiding Officer knows, in our last National Defense Authorization Act, we had significant authorization and funding to help Israel protect itself with a missile defense system, the Iron Dome system, where we have been working with the Israelis to help their citizens be protected against an Iranian missile threat.

Again, I support all of these. I applaud these efforts. I have supported them, I voted for them, but it does beg the question that some of my constituents back home in Alaska are beginning to ask, and I am sure other Americans are asking in every State in the country: What about us? What about the United States? What about the U.S. homeland? Isn't that where Kim Jong Un said he wants to launch intercontinental ballistic nuclear missiles? It is. It is exactly where he said he wants to do it.

The bottom line is, we need to do much more to protect ourselves. We need to do much more to protect the United States of America. Yes, we need to protect our allies, but we need to start focusing a little bit more on home, and we need to start focusing now.

In fact, if we know this threat is coming, which we do—there has been testimony after testimony—I think it would be the height of irresponsibility to not start working on increasing America's homeland missile defense. That is what we should be doing.

That is why I have introduced a very bipartisan bill called the Advancing America's Missile Defense Act of 2017. Again, Republicans and Democrats are already on the bill. I believe the Presiding Officer is now a cosponsor.

I would like to paint a scenario that we all know will happen unfortunately sometime in the future—again, on why this bill is so important, why what we need to be doing on missile defense is so important.

Just think through the headline. Let's assume a couple years down the road Kim Jong Un has this capability to launch an intercontinental nuclear