

One of the things we face is to make sure we have accessible, affordable care for anyone who wants to buy health insurance.

I rise today, as I have in the past, to share real stories from real Iowans who have been harmed—not helped—by the Affordable Care Act. I know there are plenty of examples we can give of people who have not benefited from the Affordable Care Act. As we have found so many times, the Affordable Care Act has become the un-Affordable Care Act. The other side often talks about the benefits of ACA without mentioning the reality I am trying to bring to this debate.

There is a reason Republicans are acting to protect Americans from the loss of access to medical care. ObamaCare has broken its promises. All these promises, made over and over again, have not stood the test of time, so I would like to remind everyone of some of these promises.

The promise: If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor.

The reality: This promise was even scrubbed from the ObamaCare website after everyone knew it was a farce.

The promise: You will be able to keep your insurance plan.

What is the reality? In the fall of 2013, between 7 and 12 million people had health insurance cancelled. ObamaCare's mandates resulted in fewer choices for people to buy affordable insurance. People were kicked off plans they liked and plans that, until ObamaCare, they could afford. This promise was dubbed the "Lie of the Year."

Another promise was made: Your premiums will go down by \$2,500.

That is not even close. I have been quoting for a long period of time that they had gone up at least \$3,500. Now, more recently, I have seen a figure of an average of \$4,300. So, in reality, that \$2,500 promise that premiums would go down wasn't even close.

In Iowa, premiums increased up to 43 percent in just 1 year. One farmer told me that his insurance went up from \$20,000 to \$32,000 in 1 year. He was able to get the premium down to \$25,000 by taking advantage of an HMO, but the deductible for that plan was \$15,000. You have an insurance policy, but you may never use it.

The biggest promise: You were promised access to affordable health care. The law is called the Affordable Care Act. That is the most concerning of all—the situation created by ObamaCare is far from affordable.

What is the reality? Premiums in 2017 have doubled for a majority of States using ObamaCare exchanges. In three States, premiums have tripled during ObamaCare. One Iowan from Pomeroy, IA, wrote to me and said she shopped for an ObamaCare plan and found that she would have to pay \$9,000 out-of-pocket before her insurance kicks in. She told me she doesn't know where that money would come from, and of course that makes that policy too expensive to use.

For the past 7 years, ObamaCare has not been working, and it will never work for the American people. Republicans are not going to accept failure. That is why we are working so hard to put together what we have promised the people of this country for the last 7 years—to repeal and replace. Pointing out the shortcomings of affordable care, we aim for better, and that is what guides us as we continue to work on repealing and replacing this failed law.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

ARCTIC COUNCIL

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I often come to the floor of the U.S. Senate to discuss issues of the Arctic. Since the United States is an Arctic nation, it seems that it is only appropriate to give updates when there have been items and events that are noteworthy in this space.

Several weeks ago, we hosted in Alaska the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, an event duly of note and an event upon which I would like to spend a few moments this afternoon updating colleagues on all that took place at this ministerial and provide a little bit of a recap of the role of the United States as chairman of the Arctic Council for these past 2 years.

This opportunity today to congratulate those in the State Department, the people of Fairbanks, AK, and the Alaska Arctic Council Host Committee for a successful Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Fairbanks is certainly timely.

I have also come to review the accomplishments and the challenges of the Arctic Council during the recent chairmanship by the United States and I think also to look ahead at what I hope and expect will be our Nation's continued leadership in the Arctic.

As I mentioned, for the past 2 years now, the United States has been chair of the Arctic Council. This is an international forum for the eight Arctic nations. That includes the United States, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden. It also includes six permanent participant organizations that represent the indigenous peoples of the Arctic, as well as dozens of interested observer nations and international organizations.

I think it is important to recognize that while you would understand and assume that the Arctic nations are clearly interested in happenings in the Arctic, the interest in being an official observer as part of the Arctic Council has grown steadily in these recent years as nations around the world are recognizing the opportunities that are presenting themselves in this portion of the globe.

The Arctic Council was established in 1996, and it focuses its work on sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. When we

speak at these council meetings, as Arctic Parliamentarians, we always refer to the Arctic as a zone of peace. It is that way now; we would like to see it remain so.

Back in April of 2015, the United States took over as chair from Canada, and at that time, the United States proposed three thematic areas that we would focus on during this 2-year chairmanship. Those three areas were improving economic and living conditions in Arctic communities; Arctic Ocean safety, security, and stewardship; and the third issue area was to address the impacts of climate change.

While there were many who believed that the previous administration focused most of its attention on climate change—sometimes at the expense of the other two areas and most notably the focus on economic and living conditions for the people who live and work and raise their families in the Arctic—I believe we saw a good outcome from this 2-year chairmanship.

I would like to note today and acknowledge the work of Julie Gourley as the U.S. Senior Arctic Official; the work of Ambassador David Balton as the chair of the Senior Arctic Officials; and ADM Robert Papp, who served as the U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic. All three of these individuals served to facilitate the U.S. chairmanship and worked to increase public awareness and knowledge of the Arctic. I thank them for that.

I also commend the City of Fairbanks and the Fairbanks North Star Borough, which hosted the ministerial meeting. I think it is important to recognize that most assumed that when the United States hosted the ministerial, it would be in Alaska's largest city. Anchorage certainly has the ability to accommodate just about any conference, anywhere, at any time, but I think it was significant that we chose to host in a city that—while it is not above the Arctic Circle, it is getting pretty close up there.

The people of Fairbanks went all out to embrace our friends from around the world. Their efforts were matched by the tremendous work of the Alaska Arctic Council Host Committee and particularly of Nils Andreassen, who connected the Arctic Council with the host communities during its numerous meetings.

In the past, what we had seen at these Arctic Council meetings was folks would fly into an Arctic location, and more often than not, we would be in a large conference hall, typically with no windows and closed doors, and then everyone would fly out without having any real interaction with the community. They wouldn't have an opportunity to engage with the public, and sometimes it made the work of the Arctic Council a little bit of a mystery.

I think we missed some opportunities to build support for the Arctic Council and its work and also to learn and to hear from those who live in our Arctic

communities what matters are of concern to them. The Alaska Host Committee worked to break down that barrier by organizing side events. There were dozens of different side events and receptions that allowed for critical interaction.

The City of Fairbanks and the North Star Borough provided incredible hospitality. They always do that, but I think this time they went above and beyond in rolling out the red carpet to ensure the success of the meeting for all who were involved.

During the U.S. chairmanship, there were a number of successful activities that I would like to highlight briefly.

First, there was an agreement on enhancing international arctic scientific cooperation. This was signed by all eight Arctic nations at the Fairbanks ministerial. It is now the third legally binding agreement among the Arctic nations. We have already done an agreement on search and rescue and a second one on oil spill preparedness. This is now the third, focusing on scientific cooperation. This new agreement will allow scientists to more freely and assuredly work across political borders to develop scientific knowledge about the Arctic.

What I think is significant about this particular document is that the process to develop the agreement was co-chaired by the United States and Russia. This demonstrates that while our nations clearly have a good number of disagreements and disputes around the world, the Arctic can be that place of cooperation. I think we demonstrated that with this particular scientific cooperation.

Another area of focus was on telecommunication. For the first time, we have assessed telecommunication infrastructure in the Arctic. For anyone who has been there or who has been to any very remote location, you know well the importance of dependable communications. Those familiar with the Arctic know that we have significant gaps. We have significant challenges in this area. Finland, which has now assumed the chairmanship, will take this issue with them and work with the private sector to do what they can to improve telecom in the Arctic.

The Arctic Council also launched an Arctic ship traffic data cooperative agreement. The intent is to have a better understanding of the ships that are operating in the Arctic.

As we all know, we are seeing sea ice recede. We are seeing shipping lanes in areas where we have not had an opportunity to have ships or any level of commerce. With this project, we are seeking to collect information from each Arctic nation about the shipping activity in the Arctic for traffic trend analysis.

This is important because we are seeing an increase in shipping levels in the U.S. Arctic—an increase by nearly 60 percent over the last 8 years. It is clearly expected to increase with every passing year, as we are seeing sea ice

diminish. As we are seeing this increased volume of shipping traffic, I think it is important to keep in mind that when it comes to charting, when it comes to mapping, less than 5 percent of the U.S. Arctic has been charted to modern standards.

Again, think about what is happening. We are seeing increased shipping traffic. We still don't know as much as we need to know about the charting and the mapping, so it is vital for homeland security, for local security, and for navigational necessity that we have an accurate understanding of who is transiting when and where within the region.

I have talked with Native whaling captains, those who are engaged in a level of subsistence, particularly in the Bering Straits area. Understanding when and where and who is transiting is very important for those subsistence hunters as well.

Another item that came from the Arctic Council ministerial—and this was not a direct outcome from this meeting but the prior one—a new fund, the Algu Fund, was established to help the indigenous peoples of the Arctic more fully participate in the decision making of the Arctic Council and its working groups.

The permanent participants and the indigenous peoples who make up these representatives are a critical piece of the discussion in these significant meetings with Foreign Ministers. To have that local knowledge, to have the voices of the local people of the Arctic speaking up is important. Think about it. They don't necessarily have a formal government, a fund that can help send them to these meetings, to be part of these working groups. And so often times, their participation is not present, and not because they don't wish to be but because they lack the resources.

So this Algu Fund was established. The goal is to raise \$30 million for the fund, which will benefit the Aleut, the Athabaskan, Gwich'in, Sami, and over 40 Russian indigenous groups.

Of the other work that was conducted, seven new observers were added to the Arctic Council, including the country of Switzerland. There were additional organizations that were added, but we are now up to a total of 39 observers, 13 of these being from non-Arctic nations. So again, the interest in all things Arctic, regardless of where you are on the globe, is really increasing.

On the sidelines of the ministerial meeting, there were 12 mayors from Arctic communities in Alaska, Canada, Finland, Iceland, and Norway. They held their own forum to look at the challenges to local governments in the Arctic. Issues such as economic diversification with benefits to local populations, infrastructure investment, energy independence, efforts to adapt to a changing climate, and the incorporation of traditional and local knowledge in the decisionmaking were discussed.

These mayors from across the region saw the value of attending the ministerial meeting, even though they were not part of the official meetings. But they also felt that it was important to ensure that the people of the Arctic, those who actually live there, work there, and raise their families there, were heard in the discussions, as well.

Even after all that I have highlighted, there are many other documents from the ministerial meeting that I could mention here, but one that I would like to draw particular attention to is the Fairbanks Declaration. This is the statement signed by all eight Arctic nations coming out of the 10th Arctic Council Ministerial. I think it is significant to note that, in these issue areas that the United States focused on—Arctic Ocean safety, security, and stewardship, improving economic and living conditions, and addressing the impacts of climate change—the statements coming out were good, strong statements of agreement, and there was true cooperation and collaboration.

I think I would be remiss in stating that there was some speculation that, with a new administration taking over right at the end of the United States' term, there was some discussion as to this: Well, how is this declaration going to be coming about, because it is the United States that ultimately, as the chair, holds the pen there?

I know there has been a lot of discussion around this town about the administration's position on the Paris Agreement. The President is still determining how he wants to proceed there. But I do think it is noteworthy—very noteworthy—that the Fairbanks Declaration, which was signed by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, speaks directly to climate change in the Arctic. Specifically, it notes the entry into force of the Paris Agreement. But in looking specifically to the language relating to climate change, it states, and I will quote here:

Note again that the Arctic is warming at more than twice the rate of the global average, note with concern that the pace and scale of continuing Arctic warming will depend on future emissions of greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants, reiterate the importance of global action to reduce both greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants to mitigate climate change.

Then, it calls for the Arctic Council to undertake additional analysis. So I think that is significant as well. It is an important recognition, and, while this administration has not yet determined where they may end up when it comes to the Paris Agreement, I think it is telling to look to this document—again, that was not only signed by the United States, but, ultimately, it was drafted by the United States—as an indicator of the realities that we face with climate change and, particularly and most noteworthy, in the U.S. Arctic, where we are seeing that impact most pronounced.

I mentioned the aspect of climate change, but the Declaration is broader

than that. It also recognizes the importance of the contributions of the Arctic indigenous peoples, the importance of healthy Arctic communities, the impact of maritime activity in the region, and the emergence of the Arctic Economic Council, which is an issue that I feel very strongly about.

We had an extraordinary Alaskan woman who was chairing the AEC throughout these past 2 years, and she did a fabulous job standing that up. Her contributions were quite remarkable.

There is the need to improve the access of Arctic communities to clean, affordable, and reliable energy sources. So, again, I would commend to anyone's reading the Fairbanks Declaration. If you are interested in Arctic issues or if you are interested in just a sense of the breadth and the depth of the issues and challenges facing the Arctic region, I think it is an important document.

With our handing the gavel now to Finland, the obvious question request is this: What happens next for the United States in the Arctic? I am encouraged by Secretary Tillerson's comments in Fairbanks that the United States will remain engaged and remain a leader on Arctic policy. That has got to be key. We have made great headway in recognizing that we are an Arctic nation. At every appropriations hearing that I have been to thus far, I think I have reserved my questions to ask about Arctic-specific issues—whether it is the status of where we are on infrastructure, such as icebreakers, or whether it is a recognition and an understanding that, with decreasing sea ice up north, you have people in ships up there, which we have never seen before. Quite honestly, we now have an area of exposure. We focus a lot on the southern border. We now have a northern border that is open. What might that mean?

We were able to query Secretary Kelly this morning about possibly partnering with Canada as we look to how we can provide for sharing of information about who is coming and who is going and knowing what we have in front of us. We will have an opportunity—again, as we move forward with legislative initiatives, appropriations, and reviewing the President's budget—to make sure that the leadership that the United States has demonstrated these past 2 years as we have been chairing the Arctic Council continues and that it continues in a strong and a prominent way.

With that, I thank the Chair.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I would like to commend my colleague from Alaska. Closer to the Poles, you see the effect of climate change more starkly. I am glad that she spoke on this issue. She is a real champion for her State, which means recognizing that climate change is having an effect

on the Arctic and on those villages up there. It will have a lot of consequences going forward.

I say thank you to Senator MURKOWSKI.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the House Republican healthcare bill and the devastating effect that it would have on people with mental illness and those affected by the Nation's opioid epidemic.

Nationwide, more than 52,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2015, the most recent year for which data are available, with 63 percent of those deaths involving an opioid. This means that drug overdose deaths now surpass the number of people who die each year from automobile accidents or from firearms.

That same year in Minnesota, we lost more than 570 people to drug overdoses. About half of those deaths were tied to prescription medication—particularly, opiate pain relievers—and another 20 percent of those deaths were associated with heroin. We saw drug overdose deaths jump 11 percentage points in Minnesota from 2014 to 2015.

The opioid epidemic knows no boundaries. It has touched people and families of all incomes, of all races, and of all ages. Some communities in Minnesota have been hit particularly hard by this crisis, including our Native American population. Not long ago, I visited the Bois Forte Indian Reservation. Bois Forte is a small, beautiful reservation up in northern Minnesota, a community where people know each other and trust each other. In fact, historically, the trust has run so deep that folks in Bois Forte didn't even lock their doors at night. But the opioid epidemic—I was told this by the Tribe chairman—and the impact it has had on the people in the reservation has changed that. Opioids are changing and destroying families and communities, and one clear sign of this is that people now are locking their doors, the chairman told me.

Right now, we need to be doing all we can to help people, families, and communities that have been devastated by opioid addiction. We must provide support for treatments and other necessary interventions, and we need to be focusing on prevention. That is why we passed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act just last year, and why we followed it up with the behavioral health provisions in the 21st Century Cures Act—again, just at the end of last Congress.

Now these important advances are under threat. The so-called healthcare bill that Republicans pushed out of the House of Representatives would undermine the very programs that help people with opioid addiction. For instance, as the CBO confirmed yesterday, the bill guts Medicaid, cutting the program's budget by more than \$830 bil-

lion over 10 years. These losses are compounded by the additional \$610 billion in cuts to Medicaid proposed in President Trump's budget yesterday. In total, these cuts would amount to close to a 50-percent reduction in the funding for the Medicaid Program, causing at least 14 million people to lose Medicaid coverage over the next decade. Medicaid is the No. 1 payer for behavioral health services in the Nation. It covers both prevention and treatment for people at risk for or actively battling opioid addiction.

For example, Medicaid pays for about one-quarter of medication-assisted treatment for opioid and heroin addictions. Because of the Medicaid expansion, 1.3 million additional people gained access to behavioral health services, which reduced the number of low-income adults needing substance use treatment but not receiving it by 18 percent.

To further undermine coverage, the House bill would also allow States to eliminate essential health benefits. The essential health benefits are 10 key benefits that plans exchanges must offer, including maternity care, prescription drugs, and mental health and substance use disorder services. What we know is that before the ACA was passed, many people with private insurance did not have coverage for the mental health services they needed. One in three did not have coverage for substance use disorder treatment, and close to one in five did not have coverage for mental healthcare.

Now is not the time to be cutting back on those benefits. In fact, last year, the Surgeon General issued a report on addiction, which found that there are more people with substance use disorders than people with cancer. What the CBO score confirmed yesterday was that people who live in States that rollback essential health benefits, who still need the services that are no longer included in the essential health benefits would "experience substantial increases in out-of-pocket spending on health care or would choose to forgo the services."

The report goes on to call out the fact that out-of-pocket costs for these patients could increase by thousands of dollars a year, and the benefits would again be subject to annual and lifetime limits. Substance use disorder services are highlighted as specific benefits that CBO anticipates States will exclude first.

I want to make this clear to my colleagues and to the American people: You cannot say that you want to address our country's opioid epidemic and at the same time support this bill. Those things are in direct opposition to one another. So, to all of my colleagues who supported CARA and supported the 21st Century Cures Act, I urge you to work with us to build on the ACA so that we can effectively address the opioid epidemic ravaging our country.

My colleague on the other side of the aisle, Senator CORKER from Tennessee,