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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Gracious Lord, who has given us life, we praise You for Your faithful reliability.

Bless our lawmakers today in the work they will do. May they seek in all their labors to please and glorify You as You fill them with Your grace. May they not become weary in doing what is right, knowing that in due season they will reap if they faint not.

Lord, let Your peace flood their hearts and help them to realize that it is by Your permission that they will breathe their next breath. May they permit life's problems to make them more dependent on Your guidance and strength.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The majority leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we have been debating ObamaCare's failures and what to do about them for so many years now. We have heard so many distress stories from constituents who have been hurt. Thankfully,

the Senate will soon have the chance to turn the page on this failed law.

As I said yesterday, the entire Senate Republican conference has been active and engaged on legislation to move beyond the failures of ObamaCare for quite some time. We have had many productive discussions on the way forward. We are united in our belief that the American people deserve better than ObamaCare's unsustainable status quo.

While it is disappointing that our Democratic colleagues decided early on that they didn't want to work seriously with us on finding solutions, Senate Republicans remain focused on the following: stabilizing insurance markets, which are collapsing under ObamaCare; improving the affordability of health insurance, which is spiking under ObamaCare; freeing Americans from ObamaCare's mandates, which force them to buy insurance they don't want; strengthening Medicaid for those who need it the most; and preserving access to care for patients with preexisting conditions.

Insurance markets are collapsing under ObamaCare. We want to stabilize them. ObamaCare's champions said that the law would bring more healthcare choices, but for far too many, just the opposite has occurred. In the years since ObamaCare's passage, we have read story after story about co-ops collapsing, insurers fleeing, families losing the plans they liked, and trusted doctors and hospitals slipping out of reach.

Today ObamaCare is nearing full collapse. Americans in nearly one of every two counties could find themselves left with just one option under ObamaCare next year—which of course really isn't a choice at all—or even worse, find themselves without any option, period. This long-term ObamaCare trend is not sustainable. We have to act, and we are.

Healthcare costs are spiking under ObamaCare. We want to improve af-

fordability. ObamaCare's champions said that the law would make healthcare more affordable, but for too many just the opposite has occurred.

In the years since ObamaCare's passage, we have received so many calls and letters from families who have been hit with soaring out-of-pocket costs and skyrocketing premiums. In fact, a recent Health and Human Services report showed that premiums in the individual market rose by an average of 105 percent since the law was fully implemented in 2013.

Today the situation continues to spiral out of control. Americans in States across the country could find themselves facing more double-digit premium increases next year—as high as 30 percent, we learned just yesterday, in Washington State or 32 percent in North Carolina or 40 percent in Maine.

Another recent report found that nearly 2 million Americans who selected an ObamaCare plan ended up canceling their coverage after just a few weeks, and the most common reason they cited for doing so was that it was too expensive. This long-term ObamaCare trend is not sustainable. We have to act, and we are.

Americans are being forced to buy insurance they don't want under ObamaCare. We want to free them from that mandate. When ObamaCare's champions pushed their health law on the American people, they enacted onerous mandates that forced too many families into plans they didn't like or couldn't afford. In the years since ObamaCare's passage, we heard from Americans who decided it was simply more affordable for them to take their chance and pay the fine and go without insurance altogether.

Today ObamaCare's collapse is making the situation even more unfair. Insurance markets are collapsing, leaving Americans with fewer options. Health costs are spiking, making many of the remaining options even more expensive. That means Americans could

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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be left trapped, forced by law to purchase ObamaCare insurance but left without the means to do so. This long-term ObamaCare trend is not sustainable. We have to act, and we are.

These are just a few of the major areas that Senate Republicans are focused on as we continue working on legislative solutions to move away from ObamaCare. In doing so, we will also work toward strengthening Medicaid and preserving access to care for patients with preexisting conditions—two areas of concern for many across the Nation.

I regret that Democrats announced early on that they did not want to be part of a serious bipartisan process to move past the failures of this law. Their ObamaCare law is collapsing all around us. It is hurting Americans. It will continue to hurt even more if we allow the unsustainable status quo to continue. So we have a responsibility to act, and Senate Republicans are working together, guided by the principles I mentioned, and acting on behalf of Americans, who deserve better than the status quo, better than continuing the pain of ObamaCare.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Mandelker nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Sigal Mandelker, of New York, to be Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Crimes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11 a.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

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

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

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, we continue to make progress on legislation to clean up the mess left by the meltdown of ObamaCare, at least insofar as

it affects the lives of millions of people who buy their insurance on the individual markets. These are individuals and small businesses that don't have the benefit of large employer healthcare plans, and they have been devastated by ObamaCare.

This is a rescue mission. ObamaCare is collapsing for millions of people, and we have to act in the interest of countless families and small businesses that are suffering tremendous harm.

I have told the stories myself; others have likewise told the stories. We have seen those reported in the media. For many people, healthcare costs, their insurance premiums are skyrocketing. We also know that because of the distortion in the insurance markets, many insurance companies are simply pulling out of counties and States around the country, so people have no choices when it comes to purchasing their healthcare on the exchanges. Of course, many people continue to lose access to their doctors.

We need to contrast this with what was promised when ObamaCare was passed. I know it sounds repetitive, but I am afraid that if we lose sight of what the promises were with ObamaCare, we can't actually calculate the tremendous harm and the deception that was involved in actually delivering on that promise.

President Obama said that if you liked your policy, you could keep it—not true. He said if you liked your doctor, you could keep your doctor—also not true. He also said that a family of four could see an average decrease in premiums of \$2,500 a year—also not true.

What is the response of our Democratic friends? We saw last night that they took to the Senate floor, and they gave impassioned speeches.

First of all, they criticized the Republicans for coming forward to try to rescue the people who were being hurt by the failures of ObamaCare. They criticized us for that. Then they said that it was a secret bill after they had rejected every entreaty—every request—for them to work with us on a bipartisan basis to rescue the people who are being hurt by the failures of ObamaCare. They rejected that.

What did they do? They came to the Senate floor. They said that they hate the bill that they have not seen yet. Then they said: Oh, it is secret. So I guess it should be one or the other. Either they hate it because they know what is in it or it is secret. It cannot be both.

The fact is that we are working hard to meet our own internal deadline because we want to make sure that the people who will be hurt in 2018, when the insurance companies raise their premiums by digits—and they are in the process of getting those approved. It will occur in the July-August timeframe when insurance companies will have to calculate what the premium is that they will have to charge. Then they will have to go to the State regu-

lators and get approval for that premium increase. What we are being told is that the 105-percent increase in premiums on the exchanges since 2013—that is right, a 105-percent increase—is going to go up 20 percent or more next year unless we come to the rescue of those who are being harmed by ObamaCare.

We would say to our Democratic colleagues: Please do not wear yourselves out by doing something that is going to accomplish nothing. Channel all of that energy and that passion into trying to do something that will actually help the people who are being hurt today by the failures of ObamaCare.

They went even further. They said, well, they may decide just to obstruct the Senate's business on other matters that are not healthcare related until they can see the bill, which they will get to see soon.

As soon as we see the final product, we will get it scored by the Congressional Budget Office. Then we will have, literally, a vote-arama, where there will be an opportunity to debate in a fulsome and comprehensive sort of way and an opportunity to offer dozens—if not hundreds—of amendments to the bill, and we will vote. We will vote, as that is what we do.

There is nothing happening in secret here. In the fullness of time, we will all see the product we have been working on. As a result of their refusal to work with us, we have been working on it the best we can to try to accomplish something better than the failed status quo of ObamaCare.

We are told that they may obstruct the Senate's other business, including committee work. That is unrelated to the healthcare debate but, I guess, is just their lashing out in trying to find some way that they can make life a little more difficult here in the Senate with regard to our accomplishing other important work as well.

I happen to serve on the Senate Intelligence Committee. One of the things that we are doing is a comprehensive investigation of Russia's active measures undertaken during the last election. We have a committee meeting this afternoon.

Are Democrats really going to obstruct the Senate Intelligence Committee's work in conducting and completing its investigation into Russian activities in the 2016 election? Are they really going to do that? It strikes me as nuts.

On Thursday, for example, we also have a Judiciary Committee meeting that is scheduled to consider a critically important bill that I introduced with my colleague from Minnesota, Senator KLOBUCHAR, to help fight human trafficking.

Are Democrats going to obstruct our ability to conduct our business and block our consideration of bills involving human trafficking and providing relief for the victims?

This bill reauthorizes key programs that support survivors, and it provides