

include the alleged GRU agents, Mr. Shishmakov and Mr. Popov. They were in Belgrade, Serbia's capital. Presumably, Montenegrin authorities hoped the Serbian Government would consider expediting the pair to Montenegro as the government had done with some of the lower level coup plotters, but that did not happen, and the two Russian agents returned to Moscow.

I know that sounded a little complicated. Every American should be disturbed by what happened in Montenegro. We should admire the courage of the country's leaders who resisted Russian pressure and persevered to bring Montenegro into the NATO alliance, which finally took place officially 2 weeks ago.

If there is one thing we should take away from this heinous plot, it is that we cannot treat Russia's interference in America's election in 2016 as an isolated incident. We have to stop looking at this through the warped lens of politics and see this attack on our democracy for what it is—just one phase of Vladimir Putin's long-term campaign to weaken the United States, to destabilize Europe, to break the NATO alliance, to undermine confidence in Western values, and to erode any and all resistance to his dark and dangerous view of the world.

That is why Putin attacked our 2016 election. That is why Putin attempted to overthrow the Government of Montenegro. That is why he tried to influence the election in France and will try the same in Germany and elsewhere throughout Europe. That is why it probably will not be long before Putin attempts some punitive actions in Montenegro to show other countries in the Western Balkans what happens when you try to defy Russia.

That is why it will not be long before Putin takes interest in another American election. The victim may be a Republican. It may be a Democrat. To Putin, it will not matter as long as he succeeds in dividing us from one another, weakening our resolve, undermining confidence in ourselves, and eroding our belief in our own values.

I urge my colleagues again that we must take our own side in this fight, not as Republicans, not as Democrats but as Americans. It is time to respond to Russia's attack on American democracy and that of our European allies with strength, with resolve, with common purpose, and with action.

I would like to finally add we will be holding a hearing in the Armed Services Committee on this whole situation that took place in Montenegro.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, before the Senator from Arizona leaves the floor, he and I are very much in syncope on the question of what he has just eloquently addressed about the Russian attempts to interfere in other countries as well as in our country with regard to the elections.

I just wanted to pose a question to the Senator. Is the Senator aware, as he obviously is—but it is my rhetorical question—that the Russians have already intervened in the elections of other countries and indeed tried and it boomeranged against them against France and are probably in the midst of trying to interfere with the German election?

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, every indication, I would say to my friend from Florida, a most valued member of the Armed Services Committee, they will continue to try to interfere in any election they possibly can. They are spending large amounts of money. They have certainly, to some degree, undermined confidence between countries in the NATO alliance, and that, coupled with the degree of uncertainty here in Washington, has probably put as great a strain on the NATO alliance as you have seen since its very beginning. I thank my colleague from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, one further question. Has the Senator been—well, he obviously is aware, and he has obviously been briefed—but can he help convey the gravity of the situation of Russia's interference in the upcoming elections in 2018 and 2020, where not only is it a question of whether they would change the vote count by getting in and hacking, but they could change the registration records so that a voter could show up to vote on election day and suddenly the registrar says: But you are not registered.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I would just say to my colleague from Florida that when you look at their early attempts versus their latest attempts, they learn with every experience. It is a lot easier—as my colleague from Florida knows, it is a lot easier to play offense than defense.

We are going to have a hearing on this whole Montenegrin thing, and I know the Senator from Florida will play a very significant role. Every time we turn around, we have a new revelation of some of the activities that have been carried out, not just by Russian hackers but by Chinese, by Iranian, even by single individuals. This is probably the national security challenge that may not be the greatest, but I would say we are the least prepared for.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, this Senator certainly looks forward to that hearing in the Senate Armed Services Committee. I thank the chairman for his leadership in constantly bringing up and reminding the American people of the threat that is coming through cyber attacks into this Nation and others.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. President, I wanted to speak about what is going on here in this Capitol at this moment. It has been the subject of a lot of discussion last night and again as we have been in session today; that is, trying to hatch a plan to overturn the Affordable Care Act and to find something that would replace it. In fact, it is being done in secret.

I would just merely pose the question, Why is it being done in secret if it is to be something that is to help the American people more than what the existing law is? Why wouldn't that be something you would want to expose to the light of day? If it is to improve the existing law, why in the world would that not want to be done on a bipartisan basis?

Yet we find ourselves confronting a situation where the majority leader has said he is trying to cobble together 50 votes to overturn the existing law, and it must be something that is not very palatable in what it is to overturn the existing law. Otherwise, it would be done in the open and in the sunshine.

Now, the existing law is not perfect so we ought to improve it, but the existing law, as we have heard in some of these dramatic townhall meetings, is the reason some people are alive today. It is the reason some folks no longer have to worry about being denied coverage for a preexisting condition.

By the way, that requirement of not allowing an insurance company to deny you coverage because you have a preexisting condition is not applicable just to those who are on the State and Federal exchanges. That is applicable to all insurance policies.

So if you have that kind of condition, which I can tell you might be a condition such as asthma, we are not going to insure you for the rest of your life because you had asthma or, if you want to go to the extreme—and it has been done—an insurance company saying: I am not going to insure you because you have had a rash. The flip side of that is insurance companies put a lifetime limit on it so if they pay out up to a certain amount—let's say \$50,000—the insurance policy stops, no more payouts.

That is not according to the existing law. In the existing law, they can't say you are going to lose your coverage because you hit that lifetime limit cap that their payout is.

Every day I hear from Floridians who tell me how the House-passed bill would affect them and what we speculate, since we don't know, that the Senate bill that is attempting to be brought out at the last minute next week—what we suspect is going to be in it. Every day I hear from people.

So take, for example, the lady from Sebring, FL, Christine Gregory. She has allowed me to use her name.

My daughter has Juvenile Diabetes (Type 1). She was diagnosed at age 15 . . . when the Affordable Care Act was signed into law. I absolutely rejoiced about the end of all the horrible things that come along with having a pre-existing condition. She no longer had to worry about cancellation of her insurance, waiting periods, denial of coverage, annual and lifetime limits, higher premiums, and the dreaded high-risk pools.

Then she continues to write:

Fast forward to 2017. All the fear and the worry are back. Our President and Congress plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. Now she has the very real prospect of having to enter a very expensive high-risk

pool. That could mean bankruptcy and denial of needed medicines and care.

Take, for example, an unnamed constituent from Florida's panhandle who wrote me. I got this today.

I have chronic and persistent illnesses that would be debilitating without affordable and comprehensive care. I have chronic back pain from degenerative disc disease in every part of my spine. I have had innumerable procedures to help manage the pain, including epidural and targeted nerve block injections at multiple levels.

This unnamed individual, a constituent of mine, continues:

I am now planning to get radio frequency ablation of the nerves. Using pre-ACA rules—

Before the existing law—

I would have hit my lifetime limit at least 1 year ago and been unable to continue getting pain-managing treatment. I often feel like I am a burden to my wife who is one of the most understanding and supportive people I know.

He concludes:

If the AHCA passes and our insurance and total health costs go up significantly, the burden I feel I am right now will become a reality. Please, I deserve more than to suffer from uncontrollable pain. And my wife deserves more than to have to care for me in that condition.

The existing law is not perfect, but it has given millions of people, including those with preexisting conditions like juvenile diabetes, access to healthcare they otherwise would not receive. This healthcare bill that passed the House that is the model for apparently something—for taking it out of that—if they are ever going to get an agreement between the two Houses, that Republican healthcare bill will take us back to the days when it was nearly impossible for people with a preexisting condition to get health insurance coverage. People with asthma could be forced to pay more than \$4,000 more because of that preexisting condition. People with rheumatoid arthritis could be forced to pay up to \$26,000, and people who are pregnant could pay more and more and more.

Let me tell you about another constituent from Volusia County who shared how the repeal of this would affect her.

She writes:

My husband, a 50-year-old leukemia survivor, would lose his ability to obtain comprehensive health insurance due to the lack of protections for people with preexisting conditions.

My daughter, who has asthma and rheumatoid arthritis, would lose her ability to obtain comprehensive health insurance due to the lack of protections for people with pre-existing conditions. Our family, all hard working, tax paying Americans, will once again be subjected to annual and lifetime limits which could easily bankrupt us.

My daughter, who is a young woman just starting her career, would lose her ability to purchase affordable health insurance and receive tax subsidies that she currently receives under the Affordable Care Act.

She goes on to say that she is afraid that TrumpCare would relegate them, if you change all of that, to second class citizens.

Why am I saying this about pre-existing conditions with regard to what was passed at the other end of this hallway, down at the House of Representatives? They say: No, no, pre-existing conditions are not eliminated down there. But that does not tell you the whole story. The whole story is that, in the House-passed bill, it is left up to the States, and the States see that as a way of so-called lowering their premiums. If you start doing that for some and do not keep it spread over the millions and millions of people who are now under the protection of the preexisting conditions, it is going to become a select few more, and it is going to spike the cost of that insurance.

I conclude by telling you another part of what happened down there in the House. In effect, they changed Medicaid as we know it by cutting out of it over \$800 billion over a 10-year period.

Donna Krajewski, from Sebastian, FL, wrote to me recently to tell me what Medicaid is for her family.

She writes:

I am writing this letter on behalf of my son . . . who has Down syndrome. . . . These blocks—

That is the technical term they are using in the House of Representatives. In other words, it is capping Medicaid to each of the States—

or caps [on Medicaid] will cause States to strip critical supports that my son needs to live, learn and work in the community.

These [Medicaid] funds have enabled him to participate in an adult supervised day program and transportation to and from the site. This program involves classes, such as daily living skills, social skills, and daily life skills. He is also able to go out once or twice a week to socialize. . . . He has become more confident and happy with his life.

We need to find ways to improve the healthcare system. We need to fix the existing law. We do not need to unwind all of the good things that we have done. We need to fix it in a bipartisan way so that, when folks come to me and ask, "Senator, what are we going to do to fix it?" what I will then say is that it is my responsibility to do something.

Last week, I filed a bill, with a number of other Senators, that would lower healthcare premiums for people in Florida by up to 13 percent. What it would do is help to stabilize the existing law's insurance marketplace by creating a permanent reinsurance fund that would lower the risk that insurance companies face—a risk pool, a reinsurance fund.

It is kind of like what we did back when I was the elected insurance commissioner of Florida in the aftermath of the monster hurricane—Hurricane Andrew. Insurance companies just simply could not take the risk that a category 5 would come along, hit directly on the coast, and just wipe out everything—wipe out all of the capital reserve the insurance companies had. What they did was to go to a reinsurance fund for hurricanes, which we actually created in Florida—the cata-

strophic reinsurance fund—so that the insurance companies could reinsure themselves against a catastrophic hurricane loss.

That is exactly what this proposal is. It would lower premiums by 13 percent and create a reinsurance fund—a permanent one—that would lower the risk to the insurance companies that are insuring people's health.

At least one Florida insurer estimates that this bill, if passed, would reduce premiums for Floridians who get their coverage from healthcare.gov by 13 percent between 2018 and 2020.

So you ask: What is a suggestion? I figured that it was my responsibility to come up with a suggestion on how to fix it. This is one of several fixes, and it is a tangible fix, and it is, in fact, filed as legislation.

What we are facing in the suggestion that I have made is not the ultimate solution to solving the healthcare system, but it is one small step in the right direction to making health insurance available and affordable for the people who need it the most.

How are we going to fix it?

You are not going to do it by running around in the dead of night, secretly putting together a plan that is only going to be a partisan plan. If you are going to fix the healthcare system, you are going to have to do it together, in a bipartisan way, building consensus. That is what I urge the Senate to do instead of what we are seeing happen behind closed doors.

Let's get together. Let's work together to make healthcare more affordable for people and stop all of this stuff behind the closed doors. The American people deserve better.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 5 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 4:25 p.m., recessed until 5 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. JOHNSON).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, it is hard to argue that ObamaCare is not a failing law. Seven years after it became law, its laundry list of problems continues to grow: higher premiums, higher deductibles, customers losing healthcare plans, patients losing doctors, fewer choices, failed co-ops, unraveling exchanges. And, unfortunately, without action, that list will only get longer and the consequences will only become more severe. Republicans know that. Democrats know that. Unfortunately, many Americans know it firsthand.

The American people deserve better, and they rightly expect us to act. That