

they are better off not talking about the bill publicly. We all know, if my Republican friends believed it was a good healthcare bill, one that actually lowered costs and improved care and helped more Americans afford insurance, they would be preaching it from the mountaintops. There would be a brass band down every Main Street in America that would be announcing this new legislation—but no. They are afraid to even whisper about their bill. They want it out in the open for as little time as possible in order for it to receive as little scrutiny as possible. They do not want the American people to see that their healthcare bill is little more than a vehicle to give another tax break to the wealthy, made possible by cutting care and raising costs on middle-class Americans and those who are struggling to get to the middle class.

They do not want the American people to know their healthcare bill is mean, like President Trump said it was, because they do not think it could survive an open process so they are keeping it secret and leaving almost no time for its review. If a bill cannot survive scrutiny or public debate, if a bill cannot survive a committee process or the threat of a single, open hearing, it should never become law—plain and simple.

Now, for months, we Democrats have tried to reach out to Republicans to bring an end to this dangerous game and move toward a bipartisan process. We want to improve our Nation's healthcare system. If Republicans were serious about wanting to improve our healthcare system, too, they would get the President to guarantee the cost-sharing payments, stop sabotaging our healthcare system, and come talk with Democrats about bipartisan solutions. Instead, they are just sabotaging the bill.

As for the insurance companies which are pulling out of some exchanges and raising premiums, ask them; the No. 1 reason: no permanent cost sharing. Who is standing in the way of permanent cost sharing? The President and our Republican colleagues. They are the reason people are pulling out of exchanges and premiums are going up. They cannot escape that.

We Democrats were willing to try to work with our colleagues. We asked to have a bipartisan meeting in the Old Senate Chamber so we could discuss this—just the 100 Senators—among one another. We were rejected on that. We have been rebuffed overall, but the invitation and sentiment remains. I would remind my Republican colleagues that time is getting short for them to change their minds.

RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now, on another matter, Russia sanctions.

Just last week, the Senate approved a package of Russia sanctions that

would lock in existing sanctions, give Congress the ability to review any sanctions relief, and implement tough, new sanctions to punish Mr. Putin and his allies for meddling in our election.

The importance of this legislation is reflected in the overwhelming bipartisan vote of 98 to 2. Now we are hearing that the House of Representatives is under pressure from the White House, and they might blue-slip the bill, which could delay or prevent it from passing.

Never mind the fact that the Senate bill was written to avoid such a problem, as my friend, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator CORKER, said when he heard the news. Never mind that, and make no mistake about it, the blue-slip threat is nothing more than a procedural excuse by House Republicans who dredged it up to cover for a President who has been far too soft on Russia. This administration has been far too eager to put sanctions relief on the table. That is what this is about.

Many people, from one end of America to the other, are asking: Why? Why is he afraid of tough sanctions on Russia?

Just yesterday, the White House spokesperson said that he had never spoken to the President about Russia's interference in our election. What has Russia concluded from all of this? Putin now knows he will not suffer any consequences for disinformation campaigns, for buzzing our ships and planes, for threatening our European allies, for cyber hacks, energy coercion, or his ongoing support for Russian separatists in Ukraine.

Now, in a short time, the Trump administration is sending one of our most senior diplomats to Russia to meet with his Russian counterpart.

Is the White House encouraging House Republicans to delay this bill so they can offer the Russians something in their upcoming talks? We do not know. It sure seems possible, even likely, and it is a flatout wrong approach, as Democrats and Republicans in this Chamber agree.

The United States should not be afraid to engage with Russia, but we cannot look the other way or, worse yet, reward Putin after he directed an assault on our democratic institutions. That is why the Senate passed this package of sanctions, sending a powerful message to President Trump that he should not lift sanctions on Russia.

Responding to Russia's assault on our democracy should be a bipartisan issue that unites both Democrats and Republicans in the House and in the Senate. The House Republicans need to pass this bill as quickly as possible. Their blue-slip excuse does not hold water.

CHINA AND NORTH KOREA

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, finally, a word on China and North Korea.

Yesterday, the President tweeted: "While I greatly appreciate the efforts of President Xi and China to help with North Korea, it has not worked out. At least I know China tried!"

We will wait to see if this tweet actually signals a shift in U.S. policy—you never know with these tweets—but no doubt it is a confession that the President's conciliatory approach toward China has failed.

Just months after he was elected, President Trump said he was willing to offer a better trade deal if China worked with us on North Korea—going back on years of campaign rhetoric about getting tough on trade with China, which is something I have fully supported and opposed, frankly, both President Bush and President Obama for being too weak on trade with China. When I heard that President Trump, during the campaign, was going to be tough on China, I was glad. I thought this was an area in which we could work together.

Yet the minute he sits down with Xi, Xi sort of wins him over, and he says: Well, we will get something out of North Korea.

I told the President on the telephone that China will not back off and help us with North Korea unless they feel the sting of economic sanctions for their illicit, unfair trade practices which have robbed millions of American jobs.

The idea that China would suddenly start to cooperate with the United States after President Trump dropped his threats to get tough on China was always unrealistic and misguided. China has been unwilling to cooperate with the United States in the economic or foreign policy spheres for decades. China puts itself first. That is what it is doing now.

Let's not forget that millions of American workers have been hurt by China's rapacious trading practices over the decades. Selling out those American workers and simply hoping that China, out of its good graces, would start working with us on North Korea never made sense.

The best approach to dealing with China is to be clear and consistent and tough about America's foreign policy and economic interests. President Trump, rather than going soft on trade with China, should get tough on trade with China. That is the best way to get China to work with us on North Korea, and it is the right thing to do for the American worker.

I have some hope that President Trump's tweet yesterday means he has come to this realization and will work with us to get tough on China on trade.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Mandelker nomination, which the clerk will report.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic whip.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it was about a month ago that the House of Representatives, by a narrow vote, voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act and to replace it with their own creation. That effort by the House of Representatives passed by, I believe, 2, 3, or 4 votes. It was very close, and it was a partisan rollcall—all Republicans voting for it and no Democrats voting for it. So it came to the floor of the House without any bipartisan preparation. It was only after the vote that the Congressional Budget Office took a look at the measure and reported to the American people its impact.

Now, that is unusual because, when you take a big issue like the reform of America's healthcare system, historically, traditionally, Members of the Congress—the House and Senate—will send their versions of the bill to the Congressional Budget Office and ask for an analysis: Tell us how much this will cost. Tell us the impact on the deficit. Tell us what it will do in terms of healthcare coverage. But the House Republicans chose to vote before the analysis.

Well, the analysis still came out, and when it came out, the report was unsettling because it had a dramatic negative impact on healthcare in America. The House Republican repeal, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would mean that 23 million Americans would lose their health insurance.

Remember, we started this debate 6 or 7 years ago because we were concerned that too few Americans had health insurance and we wanted to expand the reach of health insurance and make sure that it was good health insurance, and that is why we passed the Affordable Care Act. We fell short in some respects, but we certainly achieved our goal of increasing the number of insured Americans with the Affordable Care Act. In my home State of Illinois, the percentage of those uninsured with health insurance was cut in half. In fact, it was even better than that. So more and more people ended

up with coverage through Medicaid, as well as through private health insurance.

Now comes the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, and the Republicans in the House decide to not only erase all of that progress in providing more health insurance for more families but to make it worse—to make the number of the uninsured even higher than it was. So if that is the starting point of healthcare reform, you ask yourself: Is that really a worthy goal? Why would you do that?

Well, they were forced to do it. They really were. The House Republicans really, in fairness to them, had no choice, because they made the initial decision that their highest priority was to give a tax break of about \$700 billion to the wealthiest people in America. So by creating this tax break—giving this money back to wealthy people—they took that same amount of money out of America's healthcare system. When you take \$700 billion out of America's healthcare system, here is what happens. People who are currently receiving their health insurance through Medicaid, a government program, will have fewer and fewer opportunities to take advantage of Medicaid. In fact, they acknowledged that. The Republicans said in the House: We are just cutting back on Medicaid.

Secondly, you reduce or eliminate the helping hand we give to working families who can't afford to pay their hospitalization premiums. If you are in certain categories, we give you a subsidy to pay for your premiums. So follow the logic: If you cut the taxes by \$700 billion and take \$700 billion out of the healthcare system, you have less money to provide Medicaid health insurance for those in low-income categories, and you have less money to help working families pay for their health insurance premiums.

The Congressional Budget Office looked at that and said that the net result at the end of the day is that 23 million Americans will lose their health insurance because of this decision by the Republican House. In the State of Illinois, a State of about 12.5 million people, 1 million people would lose their health insurance because of this action taken by the Republican House of Representatives.

Well, from basic civics we know that here we are in the Senate and we get our chance once the House has acted. So we have been waiting—waiting for almost a month for the process to begin. The sad reality is it never even started—not the ordinary, open, public, transparent process of debating a change in America's public health system.

Instead, Senator MCCONNELL, the Republican leader, said: What I am going to do is to take 13 of my male Republican Senators, put them in a room, and let them write an alternative to the House bill. Why he didn't initially include the women in his caucus, he can explain, but it was 13 of the male

Republicans who would sit in a room to write, in secret, their alternative.

We think: Well, most legislative ideas start with that kind of a meeting—a closed-door meeting in the quiet of a room, basic negotiation. But it is the nature of a democracy and our form of government that at some point this becomes public. Shouldn't it? If we are going to change the laws about health insurance—basic fundamental coverage for American families—shouldn't we know it? Shouldn't we know what the changes will be before we vote on them?

Well, there is a pretty rampant rumor that tomorrow, for the first time, there will be a limited disclosure of this Republican effort over the last several weeks. We are told—and it is only a rumor—that the Senate Republican leadership will sit down with the Senate Republican caucus and show them for the first time what they want to propose that we vote on.

One might say: Well, that sounds like the beginning of a good, long process.

It is not. It is the beginning of a short process, because the Republican leader has said that this time next week we will be into debating that issue and voting on it to its conclusion—in 10 days. That is 10 days, start to finish, to rewrite the healthcare system of America, 10 days on a measure that has not been disclosed to the Republican Senators—not all of them—let alone the Democratic Senators and let alone the American people. That is what we are faced with.

When we wrote the Affordable Care Act, which was widely criticized by the Republicans, let me tell you the process we followed with the Affordable Care Act. In 2009, the Senate HELP Committee—or the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee—held 13 public, bipartisan hearings, 20 walk-throughs of various proposals, and a markup in the committee that went on for 1 calendar month, and 160 amendments offered by the Republicans were adopted. That was in 2009 with the Affordable Care Act.

The Senate Finance Committee, which writes the tax laws, held 17 roundtables, summits, and hearings on the legislation, 13 Member meetings and walk-throughs, and 38 meetings and negotiations.

Keep in mind that we still haven't seen the Republican proposal we are supposed to vote on next week—this secret proposal.

The Senate Finance Committee on the Affordable Care Act held a 7-day markup and adopted 11 Republican amendments. At the end of the day, not a single Republican Senator voted for the measure, but they offered amendments, and those amendments were debated and many of them were adopted by the Democratic majority.

When the Affordable Care Act came to the floor of the Senate, we spent—and I remember this well—25 consecutive days in session considering that bill—25 days. As to what Senator