

Though we await additional analysis of the proposal, it seems highly likely that a combination of smaller subsidies resulting from lower benchmarks and the increased likelihood of waivers of important protections such as required benefits, actuarial value standards, and out-of-pocket spending limits will expose low and middle income patients to higher costs and greater difficulty in affording care.

The AMA is particularly concerned with proposals to convert the Medicaid program into a system that limits the federal obligation to care for needy patients to a predetermined formula based on per-capita-caps. At the recently concluded Annual Meeting of the AMA House of Delegates, representatives of more than 190 state and national specialty medical associations spoke strongly in opposition to such proposals. Per-capita-caps fail to take into account unanticipated costs of new medical innovations or the fiscal impact of public health epidemics, such as the crisis of opioid abuse currently ravaging our nation. The Senate proposal to artificially limit the growth of Medicaid expenditures below even the rate of medical inflation threatens to limit states' ability to address the health care needs of their most vulnerable citizens. It would be a serious mistake to lock into place another arbitrary and unsustainable formula that will be extremely difficult and costly to fix.

We are also concerned with other provisions of the legislation beyond those directly affecting insurance coverage. The Affordable Care Act's Prevention and Public Health Fund was, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, established to "provide expanded and sustained national investments in prevention and public health, to improve health outcomes, and to enhance health care quality." These activities are key to controlling health care costs and the elimination of support for them runs counter to the goal of improving the health care system. We also continue to oppose Congressionally-mandated restrictions on where lower income women (and men) may receive otherwise covered health care services—in this case the prohibition on individuals using their Medicaid coverage at clinics operated by Planned Parenthood. These provisions violate longstanding AMA policy on patients' freedom to choose their providers and physicians' freedom to practice in the setting of their choice.

We do appreciate the inclusion of several provisions designed to bring short term stability to the individual market, including the extension of cost sharing reductions payments. We urge, however, that these provisions serve as the basis of Senate efforts to improve the ACA and ensure that quality, affordable health insurance coverage is within reach of all Americans.

We sincerely hope that the Senate will take this opportunity to change the course of the current debate and work to fix problems with the current system. We believe that Congress should be working to increase the number of Americans with access to quality, affordable health insurance instead of pursuing policies that have the opposite effect, and we renew our commitment to work with you in that endeavor.

Sincerely,

James L. Madara, MD.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, even several Republican Senators are expressing concerns.

Republican Senator HELLER said: "The bill doesn't protect the most vulnerable Nevadans—the elderly, Nevadans struggling with mental health issues, substance abuse, and people with disabilities."

He continued: "The goal of healthcare reform should be to lower costs here in Nevada, and I'm not confident—not confident—it will achieve that goal."

Republican Senator SUSAN COLLINS said about the bill: "I'm very concerned about the cost of insurance for older people with serious chronic illnesses, and the impact of the Medicaid cuts on our state governments, the most vulnerable people in our society, and health care providers such as our rural hospitals and nursing homes."

Even my friend the junior Republican Senator from Texas said that under this bill, "premiums would continue to rise."

My Republican friends are right to have these concerns. The bill will not lower costs for working families. It will leave the most vulnerable Americans out in the cold, devastate rural areas, and set us even further back in combating the opioid epidemic.

This week, the Senate will witness a political exercise in that the majority leader will attempt to coerce the votes of these Senators and any other holdouts by adjusting the dials on the legislation a bit. There will be buyouts and bailouts and small tweaks that will be hailed as "fixes" by the other side.

The truth is that the Republicans cannot excise the rotten core at the center of their healthcare bill. No matter what tweaks they add, no matter how the bill changes around the edges, it is fundamentally flawed at the center. No matter what last-minute amendments are offered, this bill will force millions of Americans to spend more of their paychecks on healthcare in order to receive fewer benefits simply so that the wealthiest Americans can pay less in taxes. That is why our Republican colleagues are ashamed of this bill and are rushing it through in 4 short days.

Before we vote on the motion to proceed, I would ask my Republican friends to do one simple thing: Reflect on how this bill would impact your constituents. We are all sent here to serve the people of our States—to do right by them, to ease their burdens where possible and make sure our laws reflect a country that gives everyone an equal opportunity to succeed. The first rule of medicine is "do no harm." So it should be with government. So it should be with this healthcare bill.

But this bill will harm the middle-class family with a parent in a nursing home. It will harm the father whose son is struggling with opioid addiction and who is having trouble finding the money to put him through treatment. It will harm the child born with a pre-existing condition, who may hit the lifetime cap on healthcare coverage before he or she even enters kindergarten.

As the American Medical Association said today, this bill violates the "do no harm" standard on many levels. I believe my friends and colleagues on the other side of the aisle are men and

women of good conscience. I would ask that they think with their conscience before they vote on the motion to proceed on Wednesday.

Any bill that does this much harm to the American people ought to receive a "no" vote.

RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Finally, Madam President, I have a word on Russia sanctions. President Trump has spent the last few days firing off tweets that point fingers at President Obama's handling of Russia's interference in our election. It is good that the President has finally acknowledged—albeit implicitly—that Russia interfered in our election, something that the intelligence community has long agreed upon.

Let me give the President some heartfelt advice. Mr. President, you have to stop the name-calling, finger-pointing, and deflection when it comes to something as serious as Russia's meddling in our democracy. This is very, very serious stuff.

Whatever President Trump thinks of President Obama's actions during the election is moot. Mr. Trump is now President, not Barack Obama, and the Russian threat is still there. If President Trump is concerned by Russian interference in our election, he can step up to the plate and try to stop it. Blaming Obama is not going to solve the problem, even though that blame may be wrongly placed.

The best thing President Trump can do is to support the Russia sanctions bill the Senate passed 2 weeks ago by an overwhelming, bipartisan, 98-to-2 vote—a bill that is currently languishing at the clerk's desk in the House, at what appears to be, at least, the request of the White House.

It would be unconscionable—unconscionable—to let sanctions stay where they are or, worse, to weaken them, when Russia has interfered with the wellsprings of our democracy and, if not punished, will likely do so again.

If President Trump doesn't support the bill and tries to block it or water it down, Americans are going to be asking: What is his motivation? What is the reason President Trump is afraid to sanction Russia after they interfered in our elections? The American people are going to ask a lot of questions.

I would advise the President to stop casting blame and step up to protect the vital interests of this country, to get tough on Russia, get serious about safeguarding our elections, and tell Speaker RYAN to pass our Russia sanctions bill so that President Trump can sign it.

Otherwise, President Trump is going to be in an even deeper hole with the public on the matter of Russia.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I thank the distinguished Democratic leader for his comments. I ascribe to them.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION CUBA POLICY

Madam President, on June 16, in a campaign-style speech glorifying the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961, President Trump spoke of freedom and democracy for the Cuban people.

Those are goals every one of us in this body shares, not only for the people of Cuba but for people everywhere. But the hypocrisy of the President's remarks in Miami, where he announced his decision to roll back engagement between the United States of America and Cuba, was glaring, if not surprising.

This is a President who has praised, feted, and offered aid and weapons to some of the world's most brutal despots. A President who, when he was in Saudi Arabia, never uttered the words "freedom" or "democracy" or "women's rights." In fact, he said he did not believe in lecturing other governments about such things. Freedom House ranks Saudi Arabia as less free than Cuba.

This is a President who welcomed at the White House President Erdogan, who has imprisoned tens of thousands of teachers, journalists, and civil servants as he dismantles the institutions of secular democracy in Turkey.

President Trump praised Philippine President Duterte, who brags of committing murder and who defends a policy of summarily executing, without any legal process, thousands of suspected petty drug users.

President Trump says he admires President Putin, and he acts like a soulmate to President El-Sisi, both of whom show no reluctance to order the imprisonment and, in Russia, even the assassination, of critics of their autocratic rule.

Despite all of this—praising these tyrants around the world—President Trump has decided to make a point of going after tiny Cuba, whose government, for all its faults, doesn't hold a candle to these other autocracies.

If the hypocrisy were not enough, it gets a whole lot worse, because in doing so he is trampling on the rights of Americans—of the Presiding Officer, of me, and of everybody else in this country.

I wonder how many, if any, Members of Congress have read the details of the President's announcement in Miami, other than the couple of Cuban-American Members of Congress—neither one of whom has ever set foot in Cuba—even though it is only a few miles off our coast. They publicly took credit for writing the new White House policy.

Now, that, in and of itself, speaks volumes about the administration's so-called policy review. That turned out to be largely a sham. Apparently, every Federal agency recommended continuing down the path of engagement begun by President Obama, as did the U.S. business community and the rapidly growing number of private Cuban entrepreneurs who are benefiting from U.S. engagement.

It is especially ironic that those hard-working Cubans and private

American citizens are the ones who will be hurt by this change in policy. Instead, the President decided to toss a political favor to a tiny minority of the President's supporters in Miami.

Now, the President's party has long claimed to be a party devoted to individual freedom, as we all should be. But let me give my colleagues a few examples of what his policy means for the freedom of individual Americans.

First, remember that Americans can travel freely to any of the other countries I have mentioned, despite the repressive policies of their governments. Americans can travel to Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, Turkey, and Egypt, as well as to Iran, Vietnam, and China. We can go to any of those countries without restriction.

Of course, Americans can travel freely to Russia, Cuba's former patron. I would note that Russia is now investing heavily in Cuba's transport sector and, taking advantage of the fact that we are turning our back on Cuba, they are seeking a military base there. And Americans can travel freely to the dictatorship of Venezuela, Cuba's source of cheap oil. In fact, Americans can travel freely to any country they want, provided that country will let them in, no matter how undemocratic, no matter how tyrannical, no matter how repressive. Apparently, President Trump could care less about that. But not to Cuba, whose people have far more in common with us than those of any of the other countries I named.

No, President Trump says you can go to Iran, you can go to Vietnam, you can go to Russia, you can go to Turkey, and you can go to Saudi Arabia. You can go anywhere you want, but you can only go to Cuba under conditions that the White House and bureaucrats in the Treasury Department, who have never been to Cuba, permit.

Rather than make your own decision about where to take your family for a vacation or to experience a foreign culture, the White House will make that decision for you.

You must be a part of an organized group, and the purpose of your trip must fit within 1 of 12 licensing categories determined by bureaucrats at the Treasury Department. I suspect they have never been to Cuba.

You must have a designated chaperone to verify that, Heaven forbid, you do not stray from the program submitted to and approved—you hope—by the Treasury Department, whose employees and bureaucrats you have never met. If your application is interminably delayed or denied—for whatever reason—you are out of luck. There is no appeal.

Now, that is how the White House says that Cuba will become a democracy. By curtailing the freedom of Americans to travel and spend their hard-earned money there. By behaving the way we would expect of a communist dictatorship—not of the world's oldest democracy, where the government's job is to protect individual free-

dom, not trample on it. The example we set for Cuba is by trampling on the rights of our own people.

How well did restricting travel by Americans to Cuba work from 1961 until 2014, when President Obama relaxed those Cold War restrictions, decades after the Russians had abandoned the island and Cuba no longer posed any threat to us? It failed miserably. At the same time, it treated the Cuban and American people as pawns in a political game.

Throughout those many years, the Castro government had a ready excuse for its own failings and repressive policies. They could blame it on the United States, and for many years, the Cuban people believed it because we, with our embargo, wouldn't let Americans travel to Cuba or do business there. But with the possible exception of the Pope, I don't think any foreigner has been received as warmly or engendered as much hope for the future as President Obama did when he and First Lady Michelle Obama visited Havana. It was amazing to watch the reaction of the people in Cuba.

President Trump claims President Obama got a bad deal when our flag went up at the U.S. Embassy a little less than 2 years ago, after more than half a century. But President Trump has yet to say what the deal he believes he could obtain would look like. His so-called deal could be described in one word, "capitulation," which hasn't worked for over 50 years.

The White House decries the decrepit Cuban military's role in the economy, as if it poses a threat to us or is somehow an aberration. They should look at the role of Egypt's military and Russia's and Indonesia's and Pakistan's. They have their hands in all kinds of business and real estate ventures.

They point out the number of people arrested in Cuba has increased. I have condemned the arrests of peaceful protesters. These arrests are wrong, but they are also wrong in the countries whose repressive governments the President has praised, some of which he regards as close allies of the United States.

Now, like Americans, the Cuban people know that fundamental change will not happen quickly and that the revolutionaries who overthrew one dictator only to be replaced by another will hold on to power while they can. But they also know that their time is ending, that Cuba is changing, and that the American people can support them best by engaging with them.

Secretary of State Tillerson says the administration is "motivated by the conviction that the more we engage with other nations on issues of security and prosperity, the more we will have opportunities to shape the human rights conditions in those nations." Apparently, this administration should have added: "except for Cuba."

On May 25, Senator FLAKE and I, along with 53 Democratic and Republican cosponsors, introduced the Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba