

Likewise, Senator THUNE has quite a bit of experience and expertise when it comes to the business tax system, and he has done a lot of work over the years to reform the estate tax. So I have asked him to provide his thoughts and advice as we work through these issues.

I have asked Senators HELLER and CASSIDY to work on solutions for energy tax policy. Similarly, I have asked Senator ROBERTS to find solutions to tax issues relating to agriculture.

There are other issues out there, as well, and over time I intend to enlist the help of other committee members to focus on particular tax issues and provide advice and assistance on crafting suitable reforms.

So, as you can see, the idea that tax reform is going to be a closed-door exercise is absurd, at least as things pertain to the Senate. Every Republican member of the Senate Finance Committee is involved in this effort.

Of course, we will need to go beyond the committee as well. There are Members throughout the conference with particular interests and expertise relating to tax policy. Many of my colleagues have introduced bills over the years and have become outspoken advocates on a number of key issues. I want those Members to be involved as well.

Just to be clear, I do not think this process should be limited to just Republican input. I want to see Democrats at the table. I want a bipartisan process that renders a bipartisan result. I think the relevant leaders from the administration have said much the same thing.

I have reached out to my Democratic colleagues on the Finance Committee and invited them to participate. Once again, I do not believe this process has to be limited to the committee. Any Member of the Senate, from either party, should have an opportunity to express his or her views and ideas and have them considered as part of this process.

I am willing to sit down and work with anyone who wants to be a good-faith participant in this endeavor and who wants, ultimately, to see it succeed. After all, we have had years and years of bipartisan efforts, including working groups and reports, to find common ground. Recently, however, we have not been hearing much from our Democratic colleagues and friends when it comes to tax reform.

We have heard some of the usual accusations that Republicans are hell-bent on giving massive tax breaks to the super wealthy and inflicting some harm or another on the middle class—total bullcorn but, nevertheless, a constant theme by those on the other side. It is a constant, annoying theme by those on the other side.

We have also heard some process demands that some have set as pre-conditions for any real bipartisan tax reform discussions. All too often, those

preconditions either reflect a lack of willingness to compromise or outright demands for things that are unrelated to tax reform.

In other words, we have heard our colleagues cite a number of reasons as to why they do not want to work with us on tax reform, and I suspect that, to some degree, this false narrative about secrecy and closed doors on tax reform will be added to the list. But I will say it again: I am willing to work with anyone—Republican or Democrat—in this effort. If anyone doubts my sincerity, I think my record for bipartisanship and compromise should speak for itself.

Long story short, my goal on tax reform is to draft and pass a bill with the broadest possible support and input from all who are interested in helping put our economy on a sustained, higher growth path. To do that, I think we need a vigorous and open debate in the Senate, which, in my view, should include a full process in committee and regular order on the Senate floor. At the end of this process, no one should be able to credibly claim that he was unable to participate or that he did not have enough information about the bill.

So I hope this puts to rest any claims or suppositions that the tax reform process is going to be secretive in nature, because, if I have my way, this process is going to be open, fair, and joint. It will be open, and it will be bipartisan.

The goal of everyone in this body, with respect to tax reform, ought to be to help the American people by providing tax relief to American families, simplifying the tax system, improving our business tax system to allow American businesses to compete in the global economy, and creating stronger growth in the economy, wages, jobs, and opportunity.

I hope more of my colleagues will join me in supporting this important effort. It is important that we work our Tax Code out. It is a mess. It is not working. Too many people feel oppressed by it. A lot of our Members of the Senate do not feel very good about our current Tax Code. I do not feel good about it either. I think we need to get together as people who really want to help this country out and want to do the best for our constituents—whether they are Democrats, Republicans, Independents, or whatever—and do it the right way.

I just hope we can get enough interest on both sides of the floor to be able to do what really needs to be done in this very crucial area, and I intend to see that we do. As chairman of the tax-writing committee, we are going to do it. I just hope that I will have some support from the other side, as well, and that they will dig in and present their viewpoints and give us their ideas and help to mold and modify and work and improve and decide what is great in any tax approach that we take.

This is the greatest country in the world. We have the greatest economy

in the world. We have the greatest opportunities in the world, but we can certainly hurt every one of those aspects of our lives if we do not handle the tax reform issue properly and if we do not handle taxes properly. I think it is important that we get together, work together, and get rid of some of the churlish stupidity that occasionally exists around this place and start doing what is best for the United States of America and best for all of our supporters, best for all of our constituents, and best for the world, really, because, if the United States is strong and powerful, the rest of the world will be better off.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BETTER CARE RECONCILIATION BILL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I would like to read a few headlines from the past couple of weeks.

From the Detroit Free Press: “ObamaCare rates in Michigan could skyrocket as much as 31 percent in 2018.”

This is from the Associated Press: “New Mexico health insurer proposes 80 percent premium hike.”

From the Washington Examiner: “CMS: 47 counties won’t have ObamaCare coverage in 2018.”

From Bloomberg: “Anthem to Leave ObamaCare Markets in Indiana and Wisconsin.”

From the Washington Free Beacon: “Last Insurer in Delaware Requests Rate Hike of 33.6 Percent for 2018.”

These headlines should probably be shocking—an 80-percent premium increase; 47 counties without an insurer—but they are not. Insurers leaving the market, huge premium hikes, lack of coverage—that is par for the course for ObamaCare. Unfortunately, too many Americans have gotten used to those types of headlines. I have lost count how many times I have come down to the floor to read similar headlines.

While these headlines may not be shocking anymore, they are still disturbing. Behind these stories are tens of thousands of struggling Americans who can no longer afford the ObamaCare premiums, Americans who are losing their healthcare plan again, Americans who are worried they won’t have any coverage options at all for 2018. ObamaCare may have been well-intentioned, but good intentions are not enough.

ObamaCare was fatally flawed from the beginning, and it is rapidly imploding. We can do one of two things: We can just wait around for the exchanges

to collapse completely, as our colleagues across the aisle seem inclined to do, or we can act. Sitting around waiting for the exchanges to collapse might be the easier path, but we can't do much good for the American people if we are sitting on the bench and watching.

Republicans promised the American people that we would rescue them from the burdens of ObamaCare, and we intend to keep that promise. Last week, Senate Republicans released legislation to start undoing the damage caused by ObamaCare. It is called the Better Care Reconciliation Act.

To start with, our bill provides relief to individuals and families by repealing ObamaCare's burdensome individual and employer mandates. Under our legislation, Americans will no longer be forced to buy insurance they don't want or can't afford. Employers will no longer be faced with the choice of reducing worker hours or not hiring more employees simply to avoid the Federal Government's heavy hand.

Our bill also repeals the burdensome ObamaCare taxes. Taxes have consequences. When you raise taxes on everything from lifesaving medical devices, such as pacemakers, to health insurance itself, which ObamaCare did, it is no surprise that these things get less affordable. Our goal with this bill is to make healthcare more affordable and more accessible for all Americans. Repealing ObamaCare taxes is one part of that.

Stabilizing the rapidly collapsing ObamaCare markets is another part. Premiums on the exchanges are spiraling out of control, and insurers are fleeing the marketplace. The Better Care Act will help stabilize the markets and check premium increases.

The Better Care Act provides funding to help States implement solutions to help make healthcare more affordable for their low-income and high-risk residents.

Giving States flexibility was an important priority for us in drafting the Better Care Act. ObamaCare, of course, took the opposite approach, attempting to impose a one-size-fits-all solution on every State in the Union. But the problem with that is that it is pretty much impossible for a massive Federal bureaucracy to hand down one comprehensive solution that will somehow meet the needs of everyone in this country, not to mention that top-down, one-size-fits-all solutions are seldom the most efficient or affordable. Bureaucracy costs money, after all.

Our goal in drafting the Better Care Act was to make sure the States had the flexibility to address the needs of their specific populations. So we provide a State innovation fund to help them meet the particular needs of their residents. We also empower States by simplifying the waiver process by which they can seek relief from some of ObamaCare's demands and by allowing them to encourage a greater variety of healthcare solutions. We give

States more flexibility when it comes to meeting the needs of their residents who rely on Medicaid.

In addition to giving States the flexibility to design affordable healthcare solutions and to encourage innovation, our bill also provides help directly to Americans who are most in need. The Better Care Act provides advanceable and refundable tax credits to Americans making from zero to 350 percent of the Federal poverty level. The credits are adjusted to ensure that those in the most need get the most help.

Among other things, these credits will provide help to low-income Americans around the country who currently receive no healthcare assistance. In many States, thousands of Americans are unable to qualify for Medicaid but don't earn enough to get ObamaCare subsidies. That leaves these families with no assistance when it comes to purchasing health insurance. The Better Care Act fixes this.

The Wall Street Journal reports: "The Senate bill would extend eligibility for premium subsidies to about 2.6 million more adults with income below the federal poverty line, according to estimates from the Kaiser Family Foundation."

Since ObamaCare became law, I have heard from so many South Dakotans struggling under the law's mandates and the massive healthcare costs it has imposed. This bill is going to bring them relief. No more ObamaCare mandates, protection for those with pre-existing conditions, more affordable premiums, a more stable insurance market, assistance for low-income families, more flexibility to contribute to health savings accounts, increased flexibility for States to meet the needs of their Medicaid populations, more funding for hospitals that provide care to low-income South Dakotans, relief from ObamaCare taxes and, for the first time ever, 37,000 South Dakotans living below 100 percent of the poverty level will have assistance in getting health insurance on the individual market. This bill will give South Dakotans and all Americans access to better and more affordable healthcare.

The Better Care Act is the product of weeks of dialogue and collaboration among the Members of our conference, and I am particularly grateful to Senators ALEXANDER, ENZI, and HATCH, who have helped provide outstanding leadership throughout this process.

As I said earlier, Republicans made the American people a promise. We promised we would provide relief to the millions of Americans suffering under ObamaCare, and this bill delivers on that promise. I hope we will have the opportunity soon to vote for this legislation because it is time to give the American people access to real healthcare reform.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Michigan.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I just want to take a moment because we have all been so focused, and there has been so much concern about what is going to happen in terms of healthcare in this country. So many people have called me concerned about whether they are going to be able to continue their cancer treatments or whether their child is going to be able to get the operation they need or whether their mom with Alzheimer's is going to be able to continue to get nursing home care and so on, and I thank everyone who has told their story.

We have spent 6 months. This debate, this fight, isn't over yet, but it started the day after we were all sworn in, in this Chamber, in January, on January 4. A process was set up intentionally to be a partisan process that took just 51 votes, and instead of the regular committee process and working together, a path was initiated. Great concern went out across the country about what would be happening in terms of healthcare.

People have spoken up. They have written letters, emails, and made phone calls, and marched and told their stories. Today, at least for a moment, this Senate will not proceed this week because there are not the votes to proceed to what I believe is a complete unraveling of our healthcare system. That may come. Certainly, I don't underestimate people's abilities to make deals and to create a way to have this happen when we get back from the Fourth of July, but at least, in the short run, I want to thank everybody who has been involved and spoken out about this critically important issue.

There are lots of things that have been said on this floor and have been said publicly about the healthcare system. We do have a situation of people buying insurance on the private exchanges where there is a combination of things that have been done to create the situation where people are paying more, but there are also situations where there are problems and not enough competition and areas where people are paying too much, and we need to address that.

One of the biggest cost drivers is the cost of prescription drugs, and we desperately need to address that. I hope, when we come back after this next week, the Fourth of July, that we will have a conversation about the real problems we need to address, to build on healthcare, not take away medical care from tens of millions of people but to build on successes and tackle the things that aren't working.

I am very concerned about small businesses. I have introduced a bill