

other ethnic group in the country—something I like to refer to as a special kind of patriotism because they have been doing this for decades, like Sol—even at times, as I mentioned, when the country hasn't always treated that group of patriotic Americans with the respect and dignity they deserve. Sol personifies this special patriotism.

The SEALs who served with him wrote this about him in a tribute:

Sol's story will continue to be told by the men he trained, by the officers who relied on him, by the Frogmen who all respect him. An officer, a gentleman, an athlete, a friend, Sol Atkinson is all of these, but of all of these traits, he is first a Frogman.

We can see the pride the Navy SEALs have for Sol, a plank owner for the entire organization.

In conclusion, I will add that he is a patriotic Alaskan through and through, and I thank him for all he has done for Alaska, for our veterans, and for America.

Sol, congratulations on being our Alaskan of the Week. Happy Fourth of July to you, to Alaska, and to all the men and women in our military and the citizens of our great Nation.

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.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

#### HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, from all indications, our Republican friends continue to negotiate amongst themselves, behind closed doors, to revive the healthcare bill they had to pull from the floor on Tuesday.

I would suggest to my friends on the other side that there is no tweak or change or modification that will fix what is wrong with this Republican healthcare bill. The core of the bill is the problem. The American people are opposed to tax cuts for the wealthy and the reduction of the social safety net of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

The Republican TrumpCare bill is built on a crumbling, decrepit foundation, and that is because it is based on the premise that special interests and a very small number of wealthy Americans deserve a tax break while millions of Americans—middle class families, older Americans in nursing homes, folks with a preexisting condition—ought to receive less healthcare at a higher cost.

That idea is so backward, so out of step with what America wants and what actually works, it can never succeed, no matter how it is tweaked.

The one thing my Republican friends are latching on to—that their bill will

bring down average premiums several years down the line—is really a bait and switch. The bait is lower premiums, but the switch is higher deductibles and copays so that, in the end, the average American pays more than they would have otherwise. They are luring people in with a lower premium, but then they have to pay such a high percentage of their medical costs, the insurance policy is virtually worthless.

The Republican TrumpCare bill tells insurers they can offer much less generous healthcare plans than under the current system, even allowing States to opt out of covering essential benefits like treatment for opioids, mental health coverage, prescription drug coverage, and maternity care.

The result of these changes is that insurers may charge smaller premiums on some plans, but they will cover way less and, in fact, the deductibles and copays will go up—way up—in order to make the difference. So this isn't: Oh, you are not paying for some esoteric item; your insurance policy will pay for virtually nothing at the beginning if you have a high deductible.

The CBO report estimates that for an average 40-year-old with an income of \$26,500 a year, looking at insurance on the marketplace, deductibles would increase by thousands. If that 40-year-old decided on a “bronze” plan, for instance, their deductible would be \$6,000 a year, the CBO estimates. That is \$5,200 more than under current law. So we know what that means: They have to pay the first \$6,000 of healthcare, no matter what your insurance policy is. What good is that? Not much. Good for the insurance industry, maybe; not good for the average citizen. Some of my colleagues on the other side are claiming they want lower premiums, but if those lower premiums come with higher deductibles and higher copays, nobody benefits. It is a bait and switch.

What the Republican bill gives with one hand in this area, it more than takes away with the other because the lower premiums are made up for by higher deductibles and copays, so the average person pays more, not less, even when their premium goes down.

Who in America believes that folks should have higher out-of-pocket costs than before? Who in America believes that folks making over \$1 million a year—God bless them; they are doing well—deserve another \$57,000 tax break? Who in America believes that we should be making it harder to afford nursing home care or maternity care or opioid abuse treatment? Who in America believes a child born with a preexisting condition should hit their lifetime insurance limit before they even leave the hospital for the first time? Who believes in that in this America?

It turns out, almost no one. A poll yesterday showed that only 12 percent of Americans support the Republican bill. No amendment or compromise or tweak or adjustment in formula can solve that.

So I repeat the offer I made to President Trump and my Republican friends yesterday: Let's start over. Drop this fundamentally flawed approach—abandon cuts to Medicaid, abandon tax breaks for the wealthy—and we can discuss the problems that Americans are actually concerned about: the cost, quality, and availability of healthcare.

I suggested that President Trump invite all Senators to Blair House to begin anew on a bipartisan approach to healthcare. Unfortunately, the President said I wasn't serious. Mr. President: Try me. The minute you make the invitation, we will take it in a very serious way. It is not that audacious of an idea. President Obama did the same thing early in his Presidency to discuss healthcare with Members of both parties in front of the American people. Our only condition: Drop the wrong-headed idea of slashing Medicaid to give tax breaks to the wealthy. It is perfectly reasonable, and a vast majority of Americans agree with us.

Nonpartisan institutions like the American Medical Association, the National Association of Medicaid Directors, AARP, and America's largest nursing home groups are all against the Republican approach. The Congressional Budget Office and other expert analyses say that it will not actually fix the problems in our healthcare system—high deductibles, high premiums, counties with too few insurance options—and the American people are as roundly against it as any piece of major legislation I have ever seen.

So I don't believe it is unserious to ask my Republican friends to drop this particular bill and talk to us about actually fixing the problems in our healthcare system.

I don't believe it is unserious to say to President Trump: You campaigned on bringing costs down and providing care for everyone. You campaigned on not cutting Medicaid and controlling the outrageous costs of prescription drugs. These are all your words in the campaign. Well, we Democrats agree with all of that. So let's talk about it.

Fundamentally, I don't believe that seeking a bipartisan solution on the great issues of our time should ever be considered unserious.

President Trump, you have complained about a lack of bipartisanship—unfairly, in our opinion. We are offering a way to implement bipartisanship, and right now it is you, not we, who are stopping it.

I hope my Republican friends, President Trump, and the majority leader think long and hard before dismissing our offer out of hand. I challenge them again: Invite all of us to Blair House the first day we get back from recess. If you think we are not serious, try us. Democrats are ready to turn the page on healthcare. When will my Republican friends realize it is time for them to do the same?

#### RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Finally, Mr. President, as to Russia sanctions, on June 15, nearly 2 weeks

ago, the Senate, in an act of bipartisanship, passed a tough Russia sanctions bill on a 98-to-2 vote. There are very few things of such significance that this body does with such a large bipartisan vote—Democrats and Republicans, all but two coming together.

The majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, and I worked hard to pass it before a possible meeting between President Trump and President Putin at the G20 summit. We wanted to send a message to Mr. Putin: If you interfere with our democratic institutions, you will be punished. These new sanctions should also help to deter future Russian interference.

At the Speaker's request, I hope this morning the Senate will pass a technical correction to address the blue-slip issue. It is important for Speaker RYAN to get the House to act on this legislation before the July 4th recess. It is critical that Congress speak in a loud, clear, and unified voice to President Putin: Interfering with our elections—the wellspring and pride of our democracy for over two centuries—will not be tolerated, and the United States will always respond forcefully, including with the power of economic sanctions.

I want to put the House on notice. If they water down the bill, weaken the sanctions, add loopholes to the legislation, they will find stiff resistance here in the Senate.

Later today, we will break for the July 4th recess. The Fourth of July is a day to remember the audacity of a ragtag group of colonies who declared themselves free and independent from the tyranny of one of the great, mighty foreign powers. What better way to mark the occasion than for the Congress of that once fledgling Nation—now the mightiest Nation in the world, ourselves—to pass a bill that says, 241 years since that fateful day, that we intend to defend our democracy as fiercely as the patriots who put down their plows and took up muskets on Bunker Hill did?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### VENEZUELA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak about the rise of a failed state, Venezuela, and the man-made tragedy President Maduro has imposed on his citizens.

For 3 months, Venezuelans have taken to the streets in daily protests. They are speaking out against their country's economic collapse, against widespread food shortages, the disintegration of their medical system, against endemic corruption, and

against a government that denies them their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Appallingly, President Maduro has responded to the protests by unleashing his National Guard. As a recent Washington Post article stated, “Mr. Maduro and the corrupt clique around him are hanging on by the brute force of tear gas, water cannons, mass arrests, and shootings by snipers.”

Since April, Venezuela's increasingly unstable crisis has left over 75 dead, thousands jailed, and thousands more injured. Yet, instead of listening to his people's legitimate demands and mitigating this tragedy, President Maduro is attempting to rewrite the Constitution, despite widespread opposition. Additionally, he declared this week that “what couldn't be done with votes would be done with weapons.”

This is our hemisphere. This is a hemisphere that prides itself in democratic states, and here is the President of Venezuela saying he doesn't care what the voters say. With Maduro threatening to use arms against his people, one can only imagine the bloodshed and abuses will continue unabated.

Despite these threats, protests endure because Venezuelans see no alternatives. They have no other recourse against standing in lines for endless hours to scour the empty shelves at their markets. They have no other way to channel their sorrow over the spike in maternal and infant mortality rates in hospitals that lack supplies to treat the most basic diseases. They have no other way to express their outrage at the military profiting from corruption in food procurement contracts, even while children increasingly suffer the ravages of malnutrition.

Parallel to the protests, chaos is becoming commonplace. In the past 72 hours, the National Guard troops have stormed the National Assembly and assaulted opposition legislators. They came into the Parliament and assaulted the opposition. The supreme court has stripped the attorney general, Luisa Ortega, of her authorities for her criticism of President Maduro.

We have seen lootings and the burning of government buildings. Alarmingly, a rogue police officer commandeered a helicopter and launched grenades and small arms fire while flying over the supreme court. These incidents from just the last 3 days should make it clear to all we are now dealing with a failed state in our own hemisphere.

As this crisis cripples Venezuela, I call on all sides to refrain from violence. I also want to recognize that the current situation is the product of 18 years of systematic efforts to dismantle Venezuela's democratic institutions.

Since coming to power, President Maduro—like Hugo Chavez before him—has filled the ranks of government with loyalists who have led the

economy to hyperinflation and the brink of default. State oil companies like PDVSA, the country's only source of revenue, has been purged of its expertise. In a truly devastating blow to democracy and the rule of law, the judiciary has been entirely sapped of its independence so it now functions as a political appendage of the executive branch.

In the 18 months since the opposition coalition won control of the National Assembly—and I must tell you there was hope when we saw the voters in Venezuela enacted a new government in their Parliament—the supreme court has overturned every piece of legislation passed, gave itself authority to approve the national budget, and in April temporarily usurped the rest of the legislature's authorities, completely reversing the will of the people.

Additionally, as Venezuela's civilian and military justice systems have become accomplices to persecution and torture, the number of political prisoners has soared. Leopoldo Lopez, Judge Afiuni, Daniel Ceballos—these are just some of the more well-known names among the more than 350 political prisoners recognized by Venezuelan human rights NGO Foro Penal. These are people who are in prison as a result of their political beliefs.

It is no surprise the decay of judicial independence has led to an alarming rise in corruption and impunity. It is now a stated fact that senior officials have syphoned billions out of Venezuela and are engaged in the illegal drug trade.

In response, the United States has designated a dozen people under the Kingpin sanctions, including Vice President Tareck El Aissami. Interior Minister Reverol was indicted in the United States last year for drug trafficking. Even Maduro's nephews were convicted in the United States on drug charges.

The sum of these trend lines is truly disturbing. Today, Venezuela is a failed state, where authoritarian leaders profit from links to corruption and drug trafficking, while the Venezuelan people are subject to precarious humanitarian conditions and human rights abuses. Against this backdrop, we require little explanation why more than 18,000 Venezuelans sought asylum in the United States last year.

We are all concerned about the flight of people at risk. What is happening in Venezuela directly impacts people trying to seek safety coming into the United States. If all this wasn't enough, in late 2016, Venezuelan State oil company PDVSA used its U.S. subsidiary Citgo as collateral to secure a loan from Rosneft, a company that is controlled by the Russian Government and is currently under U.S. sanctions. The result is, the Russian Government holds at least 49.9 percent of Citgo's mortgage and could come into control of critical U.S. energy infrastructure, including refineries, terminals, and a large network of pipelines. This should