

I also included in my legislation a solution to deal with the two major problems that we have under the Affordable Care Act. For some people, the insurance premiums are too high. Why? Well, I asked CareFirst, which is the major health insurer in Maryland, about the uncertainty as to whether President Trump is going to fund the cost-sharing issues. My legislation makes it clear that those funds will be made available, as was anticipated under the Affordable Care Act.

I also provide predictable subsidies for lower income families, up to 400 percent of poverty, so that we can help bring down the cost of premiums in that marketplace, and we reimpose the reinsurance program so that we can spread the risk so the insurance companies know that they have a more predictable risk when they set their premiums.

All of this would make a big difference. CareFirst said that, in the individual marketplace in Maryland, if you do that and endorse the individual mandate, we could reduce our premium increases by 50 percent.

So I am trying to work, I hope with Democrats and Republicans, to deal with the problems that have been brought to our attention on higher premiums and then to deal with healthcare costs generally.

More and more people talk to me about bringing down the costs of prescription drugs. It is outrageous that Americans pay twice what our friends in Canada pay for the same medicines that are manufactured here in the United States. So why don't we have a more competitive marketplace? Why don't we have the rebates that we have in the Medicaid and the Medicare systems, and why don't we allow for more collective bargaining for prices in the pharmaceutical industry? My legislation would do that, and I know there is bipartisan support for that.

Lastly, we deal with more integrated care. I mentioned Mosaic, a behavioral health facility in Baltimore City. They have an integrated care model. If you come into their community health center, they will treat whatever your problems are. They are not going to say: Well, come in one day and we will deal with diabetes, and the next day we will deal with high blood pressure. Let's deal with the whole patient in a coordinated and integrated care model, and that would help save on costs.

My bottom line is this. No, I am not going to support weakening the Affordable Care Act. I am not going to support legislation that would diminish those who currently have coverage or the quality of their coverage. Let's work together—Democrats and Republicans—to deal with the real problems of bringing down costs in our healthcare system—everybody benefits from that—and to make sure there is more competition in our exchanges and to make sure there is better premium support for those who cannot afford their premiums. If we do that, then, I

really think we would be carrying out what the people of Maryland were asking me to do during the recess; that is, not to go back on the progress we have made under the Affordable Care Act. Let's build on that. Let's make healthcare more affordable, and let's deal with more competition on the premium costs.

With that, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

VENEZUELA

MR. RUBIO. Mr. President, I have, since the year 2014, come to the Senate floor on numerous occasions, perhaps more than I hoped to, to discuss the developing situation in the nation of Venezuela.

The reason why I have taken such an interest in this issue is because of the impact it has, first and foremost, on my home State of Florida. We are blessed in Florida, particularly in my hometown of Miami and in South Florida, to have a vibrant and diverse community with people from across the world and, particularly, from the Western Hemisphere. That, of course, includes a very substantial number of people from Venezuela, some who live in Florida for part of the year and some who have made it their permanent home. They have contributed greatly to our economy, to our culture, and to our lives.

It is through their eyes that I have witnessed the tragedy that has unfolded in that nation over the last 5 years. I use the word "tragedy," but I don't use it lightly. Venezuela is one of the richest countries in the world, blessed with natural resources that God has blessed that nation with and the largest crude oil reserves on the planet—certainly, more than the United States and Canada combined, as an example. They have highly educated and capable people and a long tradition of democracy. Venezuela has one of the oldest traditions of democracy in the Western Hemisphere. As much as anything else, not only is it a tragedy for the people of Venezuela—what has happened—but it is a tragedy for the hemisphere and, ultimately, for the world. We look at some of the great causes that the world is confronting and think what a democratic and prosperous Venezuela could be contributing, what its extraordinary people could be contributing. But the last 5 to 10 years—particularly the last 5—have largely been taken up by internal strife.

At the end of the day, my interest on the issue of Venezuela has never been the removal of anyone from power. It has been about the restoration of the democratic order so that the people of Venezuela can choose their path forward. We look at the history of our hemisphere, here in the Western Hemisphere, and we see that up until about 25 years ago, most of the nations in the Western Hemisphere were governed by dictators and strongmen on both the left and the right, and few, if any, people in our hemisphere had a role to

play in choosing their leaders. Today, but for the exception of a handful of places—predominantly, Cuba and the Caribbean and some others—almost all of the people of the region get to choose their leaders, and that has been the story of Venezuela up until very recently. Sometimes they choose leaders who agree with America, and sometimes they do not. But they choose their leaders.

In the end, we know that democracies very rarely start wars because their peoples do not tolerate it. Democracies always seek stability and prosperity because their peoples demand it, and they get rid of leaders who don't deliver.

So our goal from the beginning—my goal, in particular—has consistently been the restoration of the democratic order and, through that, the respect for basic rights and dignity of all people, particularly in Venezuela. It is sad to see what has happened because I think it is fair to say that the situation today in Venezuela is worse than it has been at any point since 2014.

We saw about a week ago the horrifying images of armed thugs storming the National Assembly—the democratically elected National Assembly—and attacking members of that assembly. It would be the equivalent of protesters storming the Capitol doors and attacking Senators and Congressmen. We saw images of uniformed personnel, some of whom, basically, are the equivalent of our Capitol Police, roughing up the very members of that assembly whom they are supposed to be protecting. We have seen the images of protests in the streets, of national guard troops firing on people with tear gas and rubber bullets and, in some instances, with guns.

We have seen these irregular groups called "colectivos" going after people in the streets. By the way, in fairness, we have seen violence on both sides of it, although the vast majority of people in the opposition—the enormous majority—seek a peaceful resolution to this. Anytime you put hundreds of thousands of people in the street, chaos happens.

You think not just of the protestors, but you think of their family members on the other side of it. We forget that these national guard troops, holding up their shields and wearing the uniforms, have sisters and brothers and husbands and wives and loved ones on the other side of that barricade, deeply dividing this proud nation with an incredible history of contributions that it has made.

The situation has now reached what I believe is the tipping point. Later this month, the Government of Venezuela—I should say the executive branch, under its current President—has scheduled an unconstitutional assembly. They call it a constituent assembly. It violates the very Constitution of the country, not to mention that the supreme court has already kind of canceled the democratic order and this adds to that. I just say this with deep

sadness. If that goes forward, I think it fundamentally changes the situation permanently.

I had an occasion early this morning to speak to the President on this topic for a few minutes, as I know he is headed overseas. He expressed his continued dissatisfaction with the course of events. I think it should be abundantly clear to everyone that this government in the United States is prepared to take additional significant measures if, in fact, that constituent assembly moves forward at the end of this month—basically, all but admitting to the world what we already know; that is, that the democratic order in Venezuela has ended.

I do believe that there is still a path forward—a path forward that doesn't involve vengeance, that involves reconciliation; a path forward designed to restore the democratic order. I believe deeply that all of my colleagues here in the Senate and in the Congress and the President of the United States are prepared to play whatever role they can to help facilitate that. I think that, obviously, ultimately, it would involve restoring democracy. It would involve respecting its own Constitution. It would involve holding free and fair elections, internationally supervised, not by the United States but by the United Nations or by neighboring countries. I just left a meeting a few minutes ago with the Foreign Minister of Mexico, a nation that has shown that it is willing to step forward and be constructive and productive in this endeavor.

That is the goal. The goal is to restore peace and order and to restore democracy and to grant amnesty and freedom to those who have been imprisoned because of their political views. Within that space, there are those within the government who themselves perhaps seek the same thing but feel trapped by the circumstances before the nation today.

So I do believe there is a path forward, but I also think it would be unfair if I didn't make clear that the time for that path is running out and the door will permanently close if, at the end of this month, the Maduro government moves forward with this assembly, which is illegal and unconstitutional. At that point, it would be clear for all that they have no interest and no intent of restoring democracy. I fear the consequences of that, not simply because of what the U.S. Government and the Trump administration might do but what it would mean to those in the streets who are already desperate as it is.

I do think that path is there. I do believe that opportunity is still available, but it will not be around forever. My hope is that cooler heads will prevail. My hope is that patriots in Venezuela—no matter what side of this debate they have been on up to this point—realize it is time to step up and further this process of reconciliation, not with a goal of vengeance or punishment but with a goal of freeing those

who have been imprisoned unjustly, with the goal of having free and democratic elections, with the goal of living up to constitutional principles, with the goal of restoring democracy to a great people and a great nation.

I know that I, for one, despite all of my criticisms and all of the speeches I have given and all of the measures we have taken, am prepared to do all I can to be helpful in that endeavor, to help the people of Venezuela take control of their destiny once again and restore the democratic order, the constitutional order in a way that unites the country, not one that further fragments and divides it.

I know the President has expressed a willingness to be involved in that process in whatever capacity is appropriate, knowing that other nations in the region are prepared to lead as well.

I thought it was important on this 11th day of July, as we get closer to that measure—which I think will do irreparable harm to this possibility—that I come here to the Senate floor and express this. In the end, I think all of us in this hemisphere and, ultimately, the world would benefit greatly from a Venezuela that fulfills its potential—the potential of its people, the potential of its economy, the potential of its proud history of democracy. Whatever we can do to be helpful in that endeavor, I know that this Nation is prepared to do in whatever capacity is appropriate in the eyes of the people of Venezuela.

Ultimately, the future of Venezuela belongs to the people of Venezuela, and that is what we stand for. We hope that we can be helpful in a process that brings them together—and not further divides them—and restores what they once had and deserve to have again: a proud democracy, a vibrant economy, and a people with extraordinary and unlimited potential to achieve great things on behalf of their nation, their countrymen, and the world.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

WELCOMING THE PAGES

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I want to welcome our new pages. They have been here all of 24 hours or so. I talked to some of them earlier today. They come from all over this country, and we welcome each of them.

I understand they are with us for 3 weeks, and we wish it could be longer. Who knows? Maybe it will be. We will see.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. President, I am here today to talk about healthcare. That is a subject we have talked a lot about, not just on this floor this week, this month, and this year but for years. A lot of times, when we talk about it, we seem to forget that this involves real people, people who live in our home States. They are moms and dads; they are parents. They are children. They are grandparents, aunts, and uncles. They are young, and they are old. They

are people from different walks of life. They are real people.

I want to talk today about one of them. Delaware is a little State. I like to kid my colleagues that a lot of days in the week I visit all the counties in Delaware. We have only three. Yesterday I got to go to all three of them.

In the southern part of our State is Sussex County, which is the third largest county in America. I think there are 3,000 counties in America. The third largest is Sussex County, DE. The county seat for Sussex County is called Georgetown.

Before I came over here yesterday afternoon to be here for the convening of the Senate, I stopped off and hosted a roundtable. There were about 20 patient advocates from organizations across the State of Delaware. We were in Georgetown at a place called the CHEER Community Center, which is a gathering place for seniors in the southern part of our State. A lot of good activities happen there for seniors from all over Southern Delaware.

Some of the organizations on the frontlines of our healthcare system were there. I am going to mention a couple of them. They include the Mental Health Association, the National Alliance on Mental Illness in Delaware, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Autism Delaware, the American Heart Association, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, the Alzheimer's Association, and atTAcK addiction. The folks at the roundtable explained to me and to others how the new plan that was presented several weeks ago would dramatically diminish their ability to care for the Delawareans they serve.

During our roundtable, we heard directly from representatives of these organizations, and we heard directly from patients. These Delawareans shared with us just how devastating a repeal of the Affordable Care Act would be for them and for their families.

One person's story stood out to me. She is a woman I have met before. Her name is Jan White. She is pictured here with her husband Mike. They live in Newark, which is at the other end of the State. If you drive up I-95 from Washington through Baltimore, on up to the Delaware line, the first town you come to in Delaware is Newark. That is where the University of Delaware is located. That is where they live.

Jan and her husband were college sweethearts. This October they are going to celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. They run a successful small business in Delaware. It involves setting up meetings, running them, organizing and running special events.

Together they have one child, a son named Ethan. This September, Ethan will start his senior year at the University of Delaware, which is one of my alma maters. I went to graduate school there after the end of the Vietnam war on the GI bill. It is a wonderful school. He will be a senior there this fall.

Jan, depicted here with her husband, was doing everything she was supposed