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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You alone reign supreme in our Nation and world. May our lawmakers permit You to direct their steps. Give our Senators a renewed sense of Your sacred presence, filling them with reverence for You. May this reverence engender in them a spirit of profound gratitude for Your goodness and grace.

Lord, inspire them to live such exemplary lives that Your Name will be glorified in the Earth. Help them to relinquish all anxieties to You, as they remember Your promise to supply all their needs. May they dedicate themselves to providing opportunities and justice for all Americans.

And, Lord, bring comfort to the families of our military personnel killed in the C-130 crash in Mississippi.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The majority leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I have often come to the floor to relay

the stories of Kentuckians who have suffered under ObamaCare.

Under ObamaCare, Kentuckians have seen their premiums skyrocket—by an average of 75 percent since 2013.

Under ObamaCare, Kentuckians have seen their options for health insurance plummet. This year, families living in 90 percent of the counties in Kentucky will have little or no options of insurers to pick from; that is, two options or less.

We all know the statistics in our own States. We also know the pain of ObamaCare is about far more than just numbers on a page. Behind each of ObamaCare's unaffordable premium increases, there is a family struggling to make ends meet. Behind all the canceled plans and restricted choices, there are countless individuals who have been left behind by this failing law.

Today Vice President PENCE is traveling to Lexington in my State to hear directly from my constituents, including small business owners who have struggled under ObamaCare. As the Vice President knows, ObamaCare's pain is about more than just skyrocketing costs and plummeting choices; its taxes, mandates, and heavy-handed regulations hurt too. They have subjected small businesses across the country to serious challenges.

ObamaCare has been hurting the men and women we represent for many years in many different ways. I am thankful we finally have an administration that seems to care, an administration that has made a real effort to actually listen to those who have been forced to endure the negative consequences of this failing law.

ObamaCare has been spiraling toward collapse for years. Today it teeters on the brink of total meltdown, threatening to hurt even more of our friends and loved ones. We really can't allow that to happen.

Doing nothing about ObamaCare is simply not an option. That is why we

have been working hard to move beyond the failures of ObamaCare with Better Care legislation. We want to stabilize and reform the collapsing insurance markets, we want to put downward pressure on premiums, and we want to put upward lift on choice. We want to give States dramatic new tools that can drive a new era of improved health outcomes, especially for those most in need, and we want to put more affordable insurance in reach for Americans. ObamaCare continues to leave behind.

If we sit on our hands, families will continue to suffer. If we let this opportunity to move beyond ObamaCare pass us by, what other options will there be? One idea from the Democratic leader is simply to throw money at insurance companies—no reforms, no changes, just a multibillion-dollar bandaid.

Another idea from many other Democrats is to quadruple down on ObamaCare with a government-run single-payer system. It is called single payer because there is just one payer—one payer: the government. Nearly every healthcare decision would be decided by a Federal bureaucrat. Taxes could go up astronomically. The total cost could add up to \$32 trillion, according to an estimate of a leading proposal.

Now, Americans deserve better than a massive expansion of a failed idea. Americans deserve better than a band-aid. Americans deserve better than ObamaCare. What they really deserve is better care, and we continue to work together to provide it. We are having productive discussions about the future of healthcare, just like we should be doing, and soon it will be time to move those discussions right out here to the Senate floor.

Once we proceed to the bill, Members—Republicans and Democrats alike—will have the opportunity to engage in robust debate and a robust amendment process right here on the Senate floor. I am sure Members will

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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have other good ideas then, and I hope they will offer them. They will certainly have the opportunity to offer them, but if the Senate is prevented from even proceeding to the bill, none of us will have an opportunity—not Republicans, not Democrats, not anyone.

I regret that our Democratic colleagues made clear from the outset that they weren't interested in working seriously with us to pursue the kind of comprehensive reforms needed to truly move beyond the pain of ObamaCare, but they will have a new opportunity soon. Once we get on the bill, they will have another chance to offer their solutions. I hope they will offer more than just a bandaid. I hope they will offer more than just a \$32 trillion reup of a failed idea.

Whatever they would like to propose, I hope they will take the chance to open debate and advance the legislative process—for every Senator, for every American.

Leaving the American people to suffer under the ObamaCare status quo, I think, is unacceptable. We have seen the pain in our home States. We have seen the heartbreak all across our country. The American people are relying on us to bring them real relief, so we will keep working hard to deliver just that.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, yesterday I shared some data reflecting the historic level of obstruction Senate Democrats have displayed when it comes to confirming our President's nominees. I noted that the opposition they have shown to these nominees most of the time seems to have little to do with the nominees themselves, nor whether or not Democrats even support them. In many cases, our Democratic colleagues actually support the nominees.

Take the nominee before us today for a U.S. district court judge in Idaho. He was reported out of committee on a voice vote. Every single Democrat then voted for cloture on his nomination. Yet Democrats still chose to throw up procedural hurdles to a nominee for whom they have no objection.

In fact, Senate Democrats have continuously forced procedural hurdles more than 30 times, compared to only 8 cloture votes Republicans required on nominees at this point in President Obama's administration.

They are obviously bound and determined to impede the President from making appointments, and they are willing to go to increasingly absurd lengths to further that goal—like requiring 30 hours of debate time on a noncontroversial nominee after having just voted unanimously that debate on the nomination was unnecessary.

If our Democratic colleagues keep up this current rate of obstruction, only allowing about one confirmation every 3½ days, it will take the Senate almost 11½ years to confirm the remaining

Presidential appointments that must come before us.

I will say that again. At this rate, it would take us nearly 11½ years to confirm the remaining Presidential appointments. That is why I say to my friends across the aisle, this near total obstruction simply cannot continue.

As the Democratic leader once said himself, “Who in America doesn't think a president, Democrat or Republican, deserves his or her picks for who should run the agencies? Nobody.” That is a direct quote from the Democratic leader.

He went on. He said: “The American people deserve a functioning government, not gridlock.”

So I would again ask my friend the Democratic leader and his party to consider the consequences of their actions and chart a different path. That is the best outcome for the country and for the Senate.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, yesterday my friend the majority leader announced he would be extending this work period by 2 weeks so the Republicans can have more time to finish their healthcare bill. With all due respect, time is not the issue. Two more weeks will not help Republicans fix this bill. Remember, the Republican leadership told everyone they would vote on the bill before July 4. Two weeks have gone by, and they don't seem any closer to having a bill that would actually improve healthcare in America. They seem even further away.

When you have a rotten product, time is not on your side. The longer you wait, the more people know about it, the fewer people like it, the less popular it is, and the harder it is to pass it. I don't even have to tell my good friend the leader that. He knows it.

I know why our colleagues are not so unhappy about what the leader said. We know why our Republican colleagues don't want to go home. They don't want to face the wrath of their constituents. If I were a Republican, I wouldn't want to go home either. I wouldn't want to face my constituents and try to defend this deeply unpopular and damaging bill.

Now, the most significant change proposed to their legislation over the

course of 2 weeks is an amendment by the junior Senator from Texas that would actually make the bill worse. By allowing insurers to sell cutrate plans that cover very few services, the Cruz amendment creates a very dangerous bait and switch. The bait is that the premiums would come down for a bit for some because insurance will not have to cover very much, and the switch is that deductibles and copays go way up to make up even more than the difference. Under the Cruz amendment, you could be paying a monthly premium for a healthcare insurance plan so threadbare, with a deductible so high that you will not get any benefit. For many, a Cruz policy could be worse than none at all. The Cruz policy leads to junk insurance, something nobody really wants, except maybe a few insurance companies.

Ironically, the Cruz amendment would cause exactly the kind of death spiral my Republican friends keep talking about. A group of patient advocates, including the AARP, the Cancer Action Network, and the American Heart Association—these are hardly political groups; these are patient advocates—said that if the Cruz amendment passed, “younger and healthier individuals would be allowed to purchase non-ACA compliant plans that have lower premiums but fewer benefits.”

Without the younger, healthier people in the risk pool, the premiums for ACA-compliant plans would rise quickly and significantly. This same kind of risk pool segmentation occurred prior to the enactment of the ACA when 35 states operated high-risk pools . . . In that experience, most of those states . . . were forced to limit enrollment, reduce benefits, create waiting lists, and raise premiums and out-of-pocket costs to the point of unaffordability. Millions of patients lacked access to care and treatment.

That is not CHUCK SCHUMER, the minority leader, talking. That is the AARP, the Cancer Action Network, and the American Heart Association. Again, those groups said about the Cruz plan that it would “limit enrollment, reduce benefits, create waiting lists, and raise premiums and out-of-pocket costs to the point of unaffordability,” because the Cruz plan is very similar to what we had before the ACA. Even the conservative American Action Forum said the Cruz amendment is “the definition of a death spiral.” Higher costs, less care, waiting lists, death spirals—that is the Cruz amendment in a nutshell. How many are going to vote for that?

That is the most significant change Republicans came up with after an extra 2 weeks on the bill. Imagine, if they have another 2 weeks, what they will come up with.

My friends on the other side of the aisle should have no illusions. They can't distract our attention from this bill by phony complaints over nominations or any other issue. More time is not going to solve their problem on healthcare. It is much deeper than that. The problem is the substance of