

they are not. They are talking about it; they are not doing it. Even our NATO allies aren't using what we have already developed and perfected. They are not using scrubbers, and they are not using baghouses for mercury.

It is not CO₂ killing people in Beijing; it is basically particulates. It is particulates that we have taken out of the air. We can do this, but we need to work together. We can't be fighting each other. There is not a West Virginian I know who wants to breathe dirty air or drink dirty water—or an American—and they are not going to. We have improved and will continue to improve. But we can't be pitting one environmental group against another manufacturing or production group, and that is what we have done. We are just tearing each other apart because we are picking sides: Are you for the environment or are you for the economy? I am for both. I am for the environment, and I am for the economy, and I think there is a balance between the two.

If we do the technology and the manufacturers or the producers of electricity refuse to use the technology that is proven, then they should be shut down. They get a certain period of time to retrofit. If they will not do it, then shut them down.

We haven't gotten there yet on this, and that is why this piece of legislation is so important. All of the working groups and environmental groups—everybody should be behind this. We have an array of Senators who have come together, unlike most bills. We don't often have this happen. I am proud of what the Presiding Officer has done. I am proud of my good friend from North Dakota. I am proud of my friend from Rhode Island. I am proud of my friend from Wyoming. I am proud of everyone coming together and saying: If we are going to use it, let's do it better.

With that I say thank you—thank you to all of us for working together on this and for continuing to move the United States of America forward. West Virginia will do its part, I can assure my colleagues of that.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). The Senator from North Dakota.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Madam President, one thing I want to talk about, as we are talking about carbon utilization—and Joe did a great job of talking about new technologies. Frequently when I talk about this topic people say: There is no such thing as clean coal. Coal cannot be a clean energy source. And I say: That is not true. I tell them about my personal experience with the largest carbon sequestration storage program in the country, up until some of the new developments, and that was Dakota Gas. I served on the board of directors of Dakota Gas, and, ironically, the carbon capture and transmission into an oil field was not done to respond to concerns globally about carbon; it was done to produce a sal-

able and lucrative byproduct—CO₂—which can be used in the oil fields.

The one point I want to make is that a lot of the new development in exploration and in production of oil is done in tight formations, shale formations. This is not a technology, CO₂ flooding isn't a technology that has been widely used in tight formations because we haven't figured out how to do it.

I want to acknowledge one of those great American corporations, Occidental Petroleum, for doing something they call huff and puff, where they inject the CO₂. They basically let that sit in the well and then eventually recharge the well. They are seeing excellent results in using this as an enhanced oil recovery method.

We are very excited about the bipartisan group. We are very excited that we can take one of the most contentious issues—one of the most contentious issues here on the floor—an issue for which, time after time, no one could find a path forward, and we have met with great success in getting good people to come together.

Finally, I want to say that it has been a joy to work with the junior Senator from West Virginia. I spend a lot of time with the senior Senator from West Virginia. The junior Senator from West Virginia, from my experience, is always looking for solutions to problems—not adding to the rancor, but looking for solutions to real problems. We have had a great partnership, and I look forward to our continued partnership in promoting and moving this issue forward.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I wanted to say a few words about the new Republican healthcare plan that was just announced a few hours ago. While there are some modest changes in it, the truth of the matter is that this plan remains a disaster. It remains an embarrassment. I think the indication that it is an embarrassment is that with legislation that would impact about one-sixth of the American economy of over \$3 trillion a year—legislation that, because it is healthcare, impacts virtually everybody—there has not been one public hearing on this legislation. It has all been done behind closed doors. Honestly, no matter what one's view may be on where we as a Nation should go with healthcare, whether you like this bill or you don't like this bill, I just don't know how someone can seriously say that we don't have to hear from physicians about the impact of this legislation on their ability to treat their patients. I just don't know how you do that—or that we don't have to hear from hospitals.

I come from a rural State. What will the impact of this legislation and the massive \$800 billion cuts on Medicaid do to rural hospitals all over the United States? There is some belief that many rural hospitals in areas

where they are desperately needed will be forced to shut down. Is that the truth? That is what I hear, but I can't tell you definitively because there hasn't been a hearing on that issue. So I don't know how we go forward with legislation without having administrators from rural hospitals coming before the committee—I am on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee—or the Finance Committee to answer that question.

The Presiding Officer comes from a State and I come from a State where we have a major opioid crisis. It is devastating the entire country. What will this bill do to our ability to prevent and treat the opioid crisis, which is decimating this country from one end of America to the other? What happens if you cut \$800 billion in Medicaid? How will people get the treatment they need today—which is inadequate? In my State, it is inadequate. I don't think there is a State in the country that today is providing the necessary treatment or prevention capabilities to deal with this opioid and heroin crisis, which is ravaging America. What impact will an \$800 billion cut have on that? I understand there is some additional money going into opioid treatment, but how do you do that without the framework of allowing people the access to get healthcare? If you get thrown off of healthcare, what will the additional opioid money mean? I think not a whole lot.

In this bill, there are still hundreds of billions of dollars—several hundred billion dollars—in tax breaks to large health insurance companies, to drug companies, to medical device companies, and to tanning salons. As a nation, are we really interested in giving significant tax breaks to large insurance companies and then throwing children who have disabilities off of the Medicaid they currently receive? Is that what the American people want? I don't think they do.

I have to tell my colleagues that this Republican legislation, as the Presiding Officer knows, has been opposed by almost every major national healthcare organization in the country, including the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, the AARP, which is the largest senior group in America, the American Psychiatric Association, the American pediatrics association. Virtually all of the major healthcare groups are saying that this legislation would be a disaster for the people they serve.

Just last night we had a teleconference townhall in Vermont and we had some 15,000, 16,000 people on the phone. The calls that were coming in were very painful calls. I almost didn't want to be honest in answering the calls. A woman calls up and she says: My son has a very serious medical illness, and we spend a fortune on prescription drugs. What is going to happen if this bill passes? What was I going to tell her, that perhaps her son would die? It is just not something I feel comfortable even talking about.

The truth is—and this is not BERNIE SANDERS talking, this is study after study after study that says that if you do as they did in the House, which is throw 23 million people off of health insurance, including people who are struggling with cancer, people who are struggling with heart disease, people who are struggling with diabetes, what does common sense tell us? If you are struggling with cancer and you lose your health insurance, what do you think is going to happen to you?

What study after study has shown is that thousands of people will die. It is not that any Republican here wants to see anyone die, but that is the consequence of what happens when you throw, as the House bill did, 23 million people off of health insurance. We should not be giving tax breaks to insurance companies and then throwing disabled children, or people with terrible illnesses who are fighting for their lives, off of health insurance.

The AARP is very strongly opposed to this legislation. The reason is pretty clear. What every person in America should understand, and I am not sure that many do, is that Medicaid now pays for over two-thirds of all nursing home care—two-thirds. What happens to the seniors and persons with disabilities who have their nursing home coverage paid for by Medicaid today? What is going to happen to those people?

What happens if your mom is in a nursing home? You don't have a lot of money, and your mom is in a nursing home paid for by Medicaid. What happens if Medicaid is slashed? What is going to happen to your mom? Is she going to be thrown out on the street or end up in the basement of your house? Are you going to have to make the choice about whether you take care of her or put away a few bucks to send your kid to college? If suddenly a daughter or a son is going to have to care for a mom or a dad thrown out of a nursing home, how do they go to work to earn the money their families need?

These are legitimate questions, and it would have been nice to have a hearing or two in order to answer those questions.

The bottom line is that we have legislation before us that is widely rejected by the American people. The last poll that I saw, which was done by USA Today, suggested that 12 percent of the American people supported this legislation—12 percent. Virtually every major healthcare organization in America opposes this legislation. There is nothing I have seen today—none of the tweaks that have been put into this make this legislation in any way, shape, or form acceptable.

It is no great secret that the Affordable Care Act is far from perfect. I don't think you hear anybody here say: Hey, the ACA is great; it doesn't need any changes. It does need changes. Deductibles are far too high in Vermont. Premiums are too high. Copayments are too high. And the cost of

prescription drugs in Vermont and all over this country is off the charts.

I was in West Virginia, and I talked to a woman for a moment after I spoke, and she said that she is taking care of her older brother. Her brother has seizures. The medicine her brother was using went up by 900 percent over the last few years. Why? Because that is what the drug companies can get away with. Tomorrow it may be 1,000 percent. Does anybody in America think that makes sense? Is anybody happy in America? Are people in Missouri happy, are people in West Virginia and people in Vermont happy that we are paying by far the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs? I don't think so. There are ideas out there about how we can significantly lower the costs of prescription drugs in this country, how we can lower deductibles, how we can lower copayments.

Now, as I have said many, many times, I happen to believe that while it is important that we improve the Affordable Care Act, at the end of the day, this country must do what every other major country on Earth does, and that is to understand that healthcare is a right, not a privilege.

Right now, we have 28 million people who have zero health insurance. If this bill in the House were to go through, there would be another 23 million on top of the 28—over 50 million people—without any health insurance. Does that make any sense to anybody?

Our job is to join the rest of the industrialized world and make sure that every man, woman, and child has healthcare as a right, no matter what your income is. When you get sick, you go to the doctor. When you have to go to the hospital, you don't go bankrupt. That is what a civilized democracy is about. That is what they do in Canada. That is what they do in the UK, France, Germany, Scandinavia, and Holland. Every major country on Earth guarantees healthcare to all people. That is where I want to see our country go, and I will be introducing legislation to make sure that happens.

More and more people all over this country want to move us in that direction. But right now, our job is to make sure that millions of people do not lose their health insurance in order to give tax breaks to insurance companies. Our job is to make sure that disabled children continue to get the care they need and older folks aren't thrown out of nursing homes. That is what we have to do.

So I urge in the strongest possible way the defeat of this legislation. Then, let's go forward to improve the Affordable Care Act, not destroy it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, it has been nearly 7 months since President Trump took office. He was sworn in on the steps of the Capitol on January 20.

Our colleagues across the aisle have had, frankly, more than enough time

to come to terms with the election results. Unfortunately, they seem to be channeling their disappointment through the confirmation process by engaging in an unprecedented level of obstruction.

We spent all this week when the Senate could do no other business on the executive calendar than to confirm three nominees—three nominees of about 500 that need to be appointed by the President. They are there only because the President would want them there. They come and go as Presidents come and go. Many of them have gone. The problem is that their replacements haven't been there.

If there is any doubt as to just how unprecedented this drawn-out confirmation process has been, let's look at how it stacks up against the previous administration. We are only a couple of weeks away from August, and Senate Democrats have only allowed us to confirm 52 of President Trump's 216 nominees. That is 24 percent. By the August recess of President Obama's first term, the Senate had confirmed 313 of his 454 nominations, or 69 percent.

So we start out with an incredibly slow start, where previous administrations—both the Bush administration and the Obama administration—by the end of the first week, or often by the end of the first day, had most of their Cabinet confirmed.

Getting a Cabinet confirmed is a process that took every minute of time that the Senate rules could possibly be stretched to allow.

Then, we look at nominations. The President, as I said, has nominated 216 people. Less than one out of four of them have been confirmed. In President Obama's term, even though he had more nominees by this time, he had a lot more confirmations. The Senate confirmed 69 percent of the Obama nominees.

There are currently more than 150 nominations waiting for confirmation, many of them are already out of committee. They are ready to come to the floor, but Senate Democrats have caused this backlog by using every procedural tactic to needlessly delay nominees. But, when they delay the nominees, they also delay our ability to get to the other work.

So there are two questions here. Are you going to let the President take over the government, which the Constitution and the Senate have been an active part of? Are you going to get the other work done? If you don't let the President take over the government, how do you effectively get the other work done? It is really a plan that works really well if what you want to do is slow down any changes of where the government was on January 20.

A Wall Street Journal editorial earlier this week said:

Democratic obstruction against nominees is nearly total, most notably including a demand for cloture filings for every nominee—no matter how minor the position. This