

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Bernhardt nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of David Bernhardt, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, July 24 marks a significant milestone in the history of my home State of Utah. On this day, 170 years ago, Brigham Young and the Mormon pioneers first entered the Salt Lake Valley. Facing violence and discrimination at every turn, Utah's early settlers crossed the Nation in search of a land where they could practice their religion free from prejudice and abuse. In the cradle of the Rocky Mountains, they found a home.

Each year, we remember the sacrifice of these courageous men and women and the miraculous events that led to the founding of our State by observing Pioneer Day. This special holiday is a celebration of the pioneer spirit, that unique mix of industry, ingenuity, and innovation that transformed an arid desert plain into one of the most prosperous States in the Nation.

Pioneer Day is a perennial reminder of how a people—left to their own devices and empowered to follow their dreams—can accomplish incredible things. It is a testament to what westerners can achieve when the government steps out of the way and allows the human spirit to flourish.

It seems only fitting then that on Pioneer Day I speak in support of David Bernhardt, a man who immediately understands the western way of life and has dedicated his career to defending it.

As my colleagues know, Mr. Bernhardt has been nominated to serve as the next Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior. Today, I wish to express my support for his confirmation in the strongest possible terms.

Mr. Bernhardt has a distinguished record of public service, having served for nearly 10 years in the Department of Interior as Solicitor, Deputy Solicitor, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Director of Congressional Affairs. Now that Mr. Bernhardt works in private practice, Mr. Bernhardt is regarded as one of the Nation's most experienced and authoritative legal minds on natural resource policy.

Broad support for Mr. Bernhardt's confirmation is a testament to the sterling reputation he has built over an accomplished career in both the public and private sectors. State wildlife management agencies, Native American Tribes, environmental conservation and wildlife protection groups, and the Congressional Western Caucus are

among the many organizations that have strongly endorsed Mr. Bernhardt's nomination. He has also garnered the support of hundreds of recreationists, sportsmen, anglers, agricultural producers, and ranchers.

Nominating Mr. Bernhardt is in keeping with the President's promise to restore trust between westerners and the Federal Government. After just 6 months in office, our President has already made tremendous progress in repairing the broken relationship between local communities and the executive branch.

Of course, significant challenges remain, especially in my home State of Utah, where reduced access to Federal land has hurt the rural economy. Fortunately, as a former Interior Solicitor, Mr. Bernhardt has the legal and political background necessary to tackle some of the greatest challenges facing Utah and the West. He is well-equipped to improve sage grouse management practices, streamline permitting on Federal lands, and increase recreational access.

Mr. Bernhardt is also committed to fostering cooperation between Interior agencies and State and Tribal governments, in addition to reducing the National Park Service's backlog. Reducing the maintenance backlog is critical to tourism in Utah, which is home to the Mighty 5 national parks.

I applaud the nomination of Mr. Bernhardt. His breadth of experience makes him uniquely qualified to serve as Deputy Secretary, and I look forward to working with him and Secretary Zinke to further the important work of the Department of the Interior.

In that regard, I also praise Secretary Zinke, who, I think, is doing a terrific job in that Department, understanding the needs of the West, especially the needs of all those areas that we know are supervised by the Interior Department. He is a terrific human being, and I have a great deal of respect for him. The reason he is so good is because he has had all the experience working in the West and living in the West and doing the things that really have made the West a great place to begin with.

Mr. Bernhardt is going to be a great addition to our government, and I want to applaud Secretary Zinke for helping to push him forward.

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 Democratic leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, as soon as tomorrow, we could be voting on a motion to proceed to the Repub-

lican healthcare plan. What that plan is, I am not sure anybody really knows. My friend the majority whip, when reporters asked him if his own Members would know what they would be voting on, said: "That's a luxury we don't have."

We have been on the topic of healthcare for 7 months. Republicans have been talking about repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act for over 7 years. Yet here we are, 1 or 2 days from a vote on the motion to proceed, and we don't even know what the Republicans plan is to vote on. We are potentially 1 or 2 days away from a vote on a bill that would reorganize one-sixth of the American economy and impacts tens of millions of American lives, and no one knows what it is. It is sort of like "Alice in Wonderland" around here. It comes down to this bizarre game where the Republican leader has basically said: Let's spin a wheel and see what we are going to vote on. This is no way to treat a matter as serious as healthcare—so near and dear to the lives of so many Americans.

I don't know how a single one of my Republican friends can in good conscience vote to proceed to a truncated debate on something as important as healthcare without knowing what bill they will ultimately be voting on. Isn't this the same party that shouted "Read the bill, read the bill" from the rafters when the Affordable Care Act was debated? It is completely bewildering.

Maybe we will be voting on the Republican repeal-and-replace bill, which will cause costs to go up and care to go down, which will cause 22 million Americans to lose their insurance, and which will so cruelly exchange healthcare for millions of working Americans for another tax break for the wealthy and the special interests. Maybe we will be voting on repeal without replace, which is even worse, which will cause our healthcare system to implode, creating chaos for 32 million Americans who would lose their insurance and chaos for millions more who would see their coverage diminish or their premiums rise. No one knows what we will be voting on. We know one thing: All the options are bad.

There is no good way out of this. The truth is, the Republicans are completely stuck when it comes to healthcare. Every single version of their repeal-and-replace bill is rotten at the core. Repeal without replace is even worse. The American people don't want tax breaks for the wealthy or the slashing of Medicaid. They don't want to repeal all the progress we made in healthcare without any plan to put in its place.

It is time to start over. It is time to go back to the drawing board—abandon tax cuts for the wealthy, abandon cuts to Medicaid, abandon repeal and run—around a set of nonideological proposals to improve our healthcare system. That is what we Democrats want to do.

I have called several Republicans. Some in their leadership are saying: Leader SCHUMER doesn't want people to talk to each other and won't let that happen if the bill fails. Well, first, I couldn't prevent it if I wanted to, and second, I don't want to. I want us to sit down and come up with ways to improve ACA. No one said it is perfect.

So if the bill fails tomorrow, we will start right away trying to work with our Republican colleagues to stabilize the marketplace and improve the cost and quality of healthcare. Whether they join us in that effort is entirely up to them.

ECONOMIC POLICIES TO HELP AMERICAN FAMILIES

Madam President, on another matter, today in Berryville, VA, the Democratic Party began presenting our vision for the future of the country. As I have traveled New York State, from upstate, rural, Republican areas, like Sodus Bay, where I was Friday, to suburban Long Island, to the inner-city Bronx, I have found one thing in common: Average families feel they have been pushed around by large economic forces, and they are losing that traditional, American faith in the future. Too many families in America feel as though rules of the economy are rigged against them. They feel as if they are getting a raw deal. And they are right. American families deserve a better deal so this country works for everyone, not just the elites and special interests. Today, Democrats started presenting that better deal to the American people.

There used to be a basic bargain in this country that if you worked hard and played by the rules, you could own a home, afford a car, put your kids through college, and take a modest vacation every year, while putting enough away for a comfortable retirement. I should know. I grew up in that America. My father was an exterminator, and he worked very hard but managed to—not making a whole lot of money—build a good life for his family. But things have changed.

Today's working Americans are justified in having greater doubts about the future than almost any generation since the Depression. Corporate interests and the superwealthy are allowed to spend unlimited, undisclosed money on campaigns and lobbying so they can protect their special deals in Washington. And for too long—far too long—government has played along, tilting the economic field in favor of the wealthy and the powerful, taking the burden off them and putting it on the backs of hard-working Americans. The result is an economy that has created enormous wealth at the top, while producing less work and less pay for average Americans. Incomes and wages have flatlined while everyday costs are skyrocketing.

Democrats, frankly, have too often hesitated from directly and unflinchingly taking on the misguided policies that got us here—so much so that

Americans don't know what we stand for. Well, not after today. Democrats are showing the country that we are the party on the side of working people and that we stand for three things: First, we are going to increase people's pay; second, we are going to reduce their everyday expenses; and third, we are going to provide workers the tools they need for the 21st-century economy.

Today we announced three new policies to advance these goals.

Right now, there is nothing to stop vulture capitalists from egregiously raising the price of lifesaving drugs without justification. We are going to fight for rules to stop prescription drug price gouging and demand that drug companies justify price increases to the public. And we are going to push for empowering Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices for seniors.

Right now, our antitrust laws are designed to allow huge corporations to merge, padding the pockets of investors but sending costs skyrocketing for everything from cable bills and airline tickets to beer, food, and healthcare. We are going to fight to allow regulators to penalize big companies if they are hurting consumers and to make it harder for companies to merge if it reduces competition.

Right now, millions of unemployed or underemployed people—particularly those without a college degree—could be brought back into the labor force and retrained to secure full-time, higher paying work. We propose giving employers—particularly small businesses—a large tax credit to train workers for unfilled jobs, with a requirement to hire that worker at a good wage once the training is complete.

In future weeks, we will offer additional ideas, from rebuilding rural America to fundamentally changing our trade laws to benefit workers, not multinational corporations. Now, we are in the minority in both Houses of Congress. We know that. We cannot delude anyone that this Congress will begin passing our priorities tomorrow, but this is the start of a new vision for our party. This set of economic policies will form the backbone of our agenda, and we welcome our Republican colleagues to join with us in any of these ideas they might find acceptable.

"A better deal" is not just a slogan; it is a mission. It is about reorienting government to work on behalf of people and families. It is not going to be the work of only one Congress. It shouldn't be the work of one party. As I said, we welcome any Republicans willing to work with us on these issues because there is an American imperative and a moral imperative to do what we are doing here.

If that torch, held by the lady in the harbor of the city in which I live—that symbol of optimism and hope for the future—starts flickering, it is a different America, an America no one will like.

American families deserve a better deal, a government that has their back and helps make the economy work for them. That is how we will restore the fundamental optimism that defines the American spirit.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, first, let me thank the Democratic leader for his statement on a better deal for all Americans.

I had a chance over the weekend to travel throughout my State, and I heard over and over again the people of Maryland talking about what we need to do on a better deal. I had an interesting forum on healthcare, and Marylanders want a better deal on healthcare. They want to make sure healthcare is affordable, that they can get access to quality care, and they can make sure we maintain the highest quality healthcare.

What they don't want to see is us moving in the wrong direction. I heard over and over again their concerns about what is happening with the consideration of the bill the Republican leadership is anticipating having a vote on later this week. That bill would proceed on legislation that would eliminate healthcare coverage for, at least, 22 million Americans, maybe as high as 33 million Americans. I must tell you that is not a better deal for Americans on their healthcare needs. We could do much better moving in the opposite direction and making healthcare more affordable, not cutting people out of healthcare insurance.

In my State of Maryland, in 2018 alone, 221,000 people in my State would lose coverage under the proposals the Republican leadership is suggesting, including 4,200 veterans, 164,000 people in the Medicaid system, and 62,000 people in the individual marketplace. That is going to hurt. These are people today who have healthcare coverage who would lose their healthcare coverage. It would hurt our seniors in the coverage they get under the Medicaid system for long-term care. It would hurt those who are working to try to end this opioid drug addiction issue.

Under the current law, mental health, behavioral health, and drug addiction is covered under the essential health benefits. It is covered under private insurance. It is covered under the Medicaid system. That is in danger of being lost under the legislation being considered.

I heard from public health and law enforcement over the weekend how that would move our community in the wrong direction if those bills were considered.

I also heard from the majority leader that all he wants to do is get on this bill, and then we can offer amendments. Well, that is not accurate. You can't offer any amendments you want on a bill that is under reconciliation instructions, and we certainly aren't