

Second, I cannot imagine that my friends on the Republican side, particularly in the Republican leadership—my friend the majority leader, who I have great respect for, and Speaker RYAN—would be complicit in creating a constitutional crisis. They must work with us and not open the door to a constitutional crisis during the August recess.

SANCTIONS BILL

Mr. President, on one last item, I know there is a lot going on today, but I just want to mention one item from the House of Representatives. Later, the House is going to take up and, hopefully, pass with near unanimity a sanctions bill that includes strong sanctions against Russia, Iran, and North Korea. It is critical that the Senate act promptly on this legislation.

I will work with the majority leader, as I have in recent weeks, to ensure its swift passage so we can get it to the President's desk before we leave for recess.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECESS

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess until 2:15 p.m. today for the weekly conference meetings.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:32 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Democratic leader be recognized for 5 minutes for debate only and that I then be recognized for 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Democratic leader.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, in a short time, we will vote on the motion to proceed to debate the House Republican healthcare bill. Several months

into this new process, with Republicans in the majority in both Chambers, the American people have not been treated to a high-minded debate or to much debate at all.

The very first action of this Congress was for the majority to pass reconciliation instructions on healthcare—a process which has locked out Democrats from the very beginning. The very first thing this Republican Congress said to the American people is that healthcare is going to be a partisan project, undertaken by Republicans and Republicans alone. Right out of the gate, Democrats were locked out. The majority leader elected to forge a bill in secret and bypass the committee process entirely—no public hearings, no open debate, no opportunity for the minority to amend the bill or even to read it before it emerged from the leader's office. Their plan all along was to keep their bill hidden for as long as possible, evade scrutiny, hide the truth from the American people, and then jam the bill through in the dead of night on a party line.

Now, here we are, after so much cloak-and-dagger legislating, about to vote on proceeding to a debate on one of the most important issues of our time—one-sixth of the economy and tens of millions' health and even lives affected without knowing exactly what we will be debating on. Perhaps nothing could sum up the process that has gotten us here quite as well as this. The best the majority leader has been able to cook up is a vague plan to do whatever it takes to pass something—anything—to get the bill to a House and Senate conference on healthcare.

My colleagues, plain and simple, it is a ruse. The likeliest result of a conference between the House and Senate is the full repeal of the Affordable Care Act or something very close to it. It will, certainly, mean drastic cuts in Medicaid, huge tax cuts for the wealthy, no help for those with pre-existing conditions, and tens of millions losing healthcare, particularly in poorer and more rural States.

The hard-right Freedom Caucus in the House would never accept a Republican bill that only repeals a few regulations in the ACA but leaves much in place.

I would say to my colleagues, particularly those on the other side of the aisle who have heartedly fought hard for not cutting Medicaid drastically, for keeping preexisting conditions, for not giving tax cuts to the rich while you are cutting healthcare for the poor, do not go along with this motion to proceed, because you know and I know what it will lead to. All of the things that you have been trying to avoid will emerge from that conference, and you will hurt the people of your States dramatically.

We all know what is happening here. The leader could not get the votes on a full repeal because it is so damaging to America. He could not get the votes even on his own bill. Instead, the plan

is to come up with a proposal that is simply a means to repeal, a means to dramatic cuts, a means to getting us in conference, and we all know what the result of that conference will be.

I would plead one last time with my friends on the other side of the aisle—and I know you have sincerely tried to modify and change things—to turn back. We can go through regular order. We want to work with you. We know that the ACA is not perfect, but we also know that what you have proposed is much worse. We can work together to improve healthcare in this country. Turn back now before it is too late and millions and millions and millions of Americans are hurt so badly in ways from which they will never, ever recover.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 7 years ago, Democrats imposed ObamaCare on our country. They said that costs would go down. Costs skyrocketed. They said that choice would go up. Choice plummeted. Now ObamaCare's years-long lurch toward total collapse is nearing a seemingly inevitable conclusion, and it will hurt even more Americans on the way down.

This, my friends, is the ObamaCare status quo. This is the status quo. We have had to accept it for a long time. We do not have to accept it any longer.

The American people elected a House with a vision of a better way on healthcare. Then they elected a Senate. Then they elected a President. Now, having been given the responsibility to govern, we have a duty to act. The President is ready with his pen. The House has passed legislation. Today, it is the Senate's turn. That starts with a vote that we will take momentarily. The critical first step in that process is the motion to proceed. It is the vote that determines whether this debate can proceed at all, whether we will even take it up after four straight elections in which this was a huge commitment to the American people. It is the vote that determines whether the Senators of both parties can offer their amendments and ideas on healthcare.

I told the people of my State, over this period, that I would vote to move beyond ObamaCare, and that is what I am going to do today by voting yes. I ask all of my colleagues to join me in doing so. We have already shown that it is possible to put legislation on the President's desk that moves us beyond ObamaCare and its years of failure. We did that 2 years ago. President Obama vetoed what we passed before. President Trump will sign what Congress passes this time.

I thank the President and the administration for all they have done on this issue already. They have worked with us every step of the way, and they, like us, know the consequences of failing to act.

Look, we cannot let this moment slip by. We cannot let it slip by. We have

been talking about this for too long. We have wrestled with this issue. We have watched the consequences of the status quo. The people who sent us here expect us to begin this debate, to have the courage to tackle the tough issues. They did not send us here just to do the easy stuff. They expect us to tackle the big problems. Obviously, we cannot get an outcome if we do not start the debate, and that is what the motion to proceed is all about.

Many of us on this side of the aisle have waited for years for this opportunity and thought that it would probably never come. Some of us were a little surprised by the election last year, but with a surprise election comes great opportunities to do things that we thought were never possible. All we have to do today is to have the courage to begin the debate with an open amendment process and let the voting take us where it will.

That is what is before us, colleagues. Will we begin the debate on one of the most important issues confronting America today? It is my hope that the answer will be yes.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that, following the vote, Senator McCAIN be recognized to speak for debate only for up to 15 minutes and that the time not count on H.R. 1628.

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

AMERICAN HEALTH CARE ACT OF 2017—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 120, H.R. 1628.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 120, H.R. 1628, a bill to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2017.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

(Disturbance in the Visitors' Galleries.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Sergeant at Arms will restore order in the Chamber. The Sergeant at Arms will restore order in the Chamber, please.

(Disturbance in the Visitors' Galleries.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Sergeant at Arms will restore order in the Chamber.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion to proceed.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 50, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 167 Leg.]

YEAS—50

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Burr	Hatch	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Cochran	Inhofe	Scott
Corker	Isakson	Shelby
Cornyn	Johnson	Strange
Cotton	Kennedy	Sullivan
Crapo	Lankford	Thune
Cruz	Lee	Tillis
Daines	McCain	Toomey
Enzi	McConnell	Wicker
Ernst	Moran	Young
Fischer	Paul	

NAYS—50

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Murray
Bennet	Harris	Nelson
Blumenthal	Hassan	Peters
Booker	Heinrich	Reed
Brown	Heitkamp	Sanders
Cantwell	Hirono	Schatz
Cardin	Kaine	Schumer
Carper	King	Shaheen
Casey	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Collins	Leahy	Tester
Coons	Manchin	Udall
Cortez Masto	Markley	Van Hollen
Donnelly	McCaskill	Warner
Duckworth	Menendez	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murkowski	Wyden
Franken	Murphy	

The VICE PRESIDENT. As a reminder to our guests, expressions of approval or disapproval are not permitted.

On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 50. The Senate being equally divided, the Vice President votes in the affirmative.

The motion is agreed to.

AMERICAN HEALTH CARE ACT OF 2017

The VICE PRESIDENT. The clerk will report the bill.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1628) to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2017.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The senior Senator from Arizona is recognized.

ROLE OF THE SENATE

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I have stood in this place many times and addressed as “President” many Presiding Officers. I have been so addressed when I have sat in that chair, and that is as close as I will ever be to a Presidency. It is an honorific we are almost indifferent too; isn’t it? In truth, presiding over the Senate can be a nuisance, a bit of a ceremonial bore, and it is usually relegated to the more junior Members of the majority.

But as I stand here today—looking a little worse for wear, I am sure—I have a refreshed appreciation for the protocols and customs of this body and for the other 99 privileged souls who have been elected to this Senate.

I have been a Member of the U.S. Senate for 30 years. I had another long, if not as long, career before I arrived here, another profession that was profoundly rewarding and in which I had experiences and friendships that I revere. Make no mistake, my service

here is the most important job I have had in my life. I am so grateful to the people of Arizona for the privilege—for the honor—of serving here and the opportunities it gives me to play a small role in the history of the country I love.

I have known and admired men and women in the Senate who played much more than a small role in our history—true statesmen, giants of American politics. They came from both parties and from various backgrounds. Their ambitions were frequently in conflict. They held different views on the issues of the day. They often had very serious disagreements about how best to serve the national interest.

But they knew that however sharp and heartfelt their disputes and however keen their ambitions, they had an obligation to work collaboratively to ensure the Senate discharged its constitutional responsibilities effectively. Our responsibilities are important—vitally important—to the continued success of our Republic. Our arcane rules and customs are deliberatively intended to require broad cooperation to function well at all. The most revered Members of this institution accepted the necessity of compromise in order to make incremental progress on solving America’s problems and to defend her from her adversaries.

That principled mindset and the service of our predecessors who possessed it come to mind when I hear the Senate referred to as the world’s greatest deliberative body. I am not sure we can claim that distinction with a straight face today. I am sure it wasn’t always deserved in previous eras either. I am sure there have been times when it was, and I was privileged to witness some of those occasions.

Our deliberations today, not just our debates but the exercise of all our responsibilities—authorizing government policies, appropriating the funds to implement them, exercising our advice and consent role—are often lively and interesting. They can be sincere and principled, but they are more partisan, more tribal more of the time than at any time I can remember. Our deliberations can still be important and useful, but I think we would all agree they haven’t been overburdened by greatness lately. Right now, they aren’t producing much for the American people.

Both sides have let this happen. Let’s leave the history of who shot first to the historians. I suspect they will find we all conspired in our decline, either by deliberate actions or neglect. We have all played some role in it. Certainly, I have. Sometimes, I have let my passion rule my reason. Sometimes I made it harder to find common ground because of something harsh I said to a colleague. Sometimes I wanted to win more for the sake of winning than to achieve a contested policy.

Incremental progress, compromises that each side criticizes but also accepts, and just plain muddling through to chip away at problems and to keep