

were burning in my home State alone. Now, there are 17 fires burning in Oregon. Thousands of Oregonians have been evacuated this summer, and thousands more are facing the prospect of evacuation.

Thousands of firefighters from Oregon and all over this country have been putting themselves in harm's way to help Oregon battle these infernos. From the Columbia River Gorge on the Washington border to Oregon's southwest corner, hundreds of miles away on the California border, I felt it was an enormous honor just to be able to say thank you to the thousands of hard-working men and women who are battling these life-threatening blazes.

I met with emergency service responders on the Eagle Creek fire in the gorge. The Chetco Bar fire in Southwestern Oregon that stretches across Jackson and Josephine Counties, the Jones fire in Lane County, and the Miller Complex fire in Jackson County. In each of these settings, I met men and women who exemplify what I call the Oregon way. The Oregon way isn't written down anywhere. It isn't a law or a rule, it is an ethic. It is an ethic where Oregonians step up and make sure friends and neighbors aren't in jeopardy, and the Oregon way is all about Oregonians staying on the job until it is finished.

I was also very moved by the presence of those from all over the country who came to our State, sometimes from thousands of miles away, to help save Oregon treasures—people from California, Arizona, all the way from the east coast and many points in between who came to Oregon to help out. It was just stunning to meet folks from Florida who, while worrying about their friends and loved ones in the path of Hurricane Irma, were up and working on our natural disaster, which is wildfire.

To get this job done right for generations to come, you have to recognize the inescapable proposition that the fires are getting hotter, they are getting bigger, and they are getting much more dangerous to fight. In one example, I heard how the Eagle Creek fire raced 13 miles in 15 hours, and it burned with such ferocity, with high winds, that it jumped the Columbia River. It jumped the river to start a fire on the Washington side of the gorge. For those who might not be familiar with normal fire behavior, I want to just take a minute and say how serious that is. Usually a river, and certainly a river as large as the Columbia, acts as a natural fire break, but these fires we are seeing today are not normal fires. These are not your grandfather's fires. These are gargantuan, dangerous fires. I haven't seen anything like it, along with my friend who has been on the Natural Resources Committee for a long time. This year is on track to be the worst fire in history in terms of total acres burned.

The Washington Post newspaper on Friday reported that with the dozens of

fires that have spread across the West, an area larger than the size of Maryland has been burned straight through.

The way the Federal Government has historically paid for fighting fires is just plain wrong, and it leads to a cycle that adds fuel to these exceptionally dangerous fires. I have been on this floor raising this issue. I served as the chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee not too long ago. Our committee has heard in hearings again and again about the dangers fires pose to our community, but the system for funding fire prevention in a timely way before our country has to spend so much more money for putting the fires out hasn't been fixed. That system is still broken as we discuss it here today.

Last week, I came to the Senate floor and talked about this subject the same day Congress passed legislation to keep the government open for 3 more months and provide aid for the recovery efforts after Hurricane Harvey. Thankfully, that legislation also included funding to ensure the Forest Service can refill the funds the agency is being forced to borrow from fire prevention accounts to fight the fires now, but that funding, certainly necessary now, doesn't fix the long-term problem.

The Congress must make sure the Forest Service has the resources it needs to treat the forest before they burn, to help deal with this issue before the forest burns, because that will make them more flame resistant and stronger in terms of the capacity to deal particularly with the heat and lightning strikes and fuel buildup.

Let me lay out the steps the Congress needs to take in the coming days. First, Congress needs to lock in disaster funding to get the communities devastated by wildfires back on their feet. They are facing destroyed homes and businesses. Recreational areas that are the lifeblood of a lot of western communities have been destroyed. They lost timber revenue. The cleanup and restoration efforts are going to be tough and costly. So that is step 1 on this to-do list.

Step 2 is fixing the broken disaster fueling budget system known in the West as fire borrow. As the government spends more on fighting fires, it has stolen, in the past, funds that are supposed to go to fire prevention so the money isn't there to thin out the dead and dying material from our forests, and all it takes is one spark to start an inferno. The problem is only going to get bigger year after year as climate change roasts the landscapes across the West and wreaks havoc across the Nation. This has gone on for years. It is leading to bigger, more threatening fires, and it is critical that this Congress put a stop to it.

Other parts of our Nation faced horrible natural disasters over the last several weeks with hurricanes battering Texas, Florida, and much of the South. The way the government pays for firefighting right now would be like funding emergency hurricane response

teams with the money that is supposed to pay for levies and sandbags for the next storm. The practice of fire borrowing that has plagued so many western communities just defies common sense.

Years ago, along with my colleague from Idaho, Senator CRAPO, I introduced a fix to this problem with the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. Senator CRAPO and I feel like we have been at it longer than the Trojan War. We have been at this year after year, and now we have the support of 261 groups and experts, folks in the forestry industry, environmental folks, scientists. Senator CRAPO, as chairman of the Banking Committee, has another bill that, in effect, builds on this work we have done for years. I support his sensible proposal as well.

The bottom line is, the West cannot wait any longer for Congress to send them help and repair for the long term, which is fixing this broken system that shortchanges prevention and adds fuel to the raging wildfires. There is bipartisan commitment to solving this crisis, and I know Senators across the West, where these fires are burning, have been going on exactly the same kind of tours I went on last weekend. I am sure they met, as I did, these incredibly dedicated, courageous firefighters who are just working themselves to exhaustion. I am sure they heard from many of the same types of operations teams about the fight they are facing.

Those men and women on the frontlines fighting fire are doing their part. It is time for the Congress to do ours. Let's make sure our communities have the funds they need to fight fires, put the fires out. Once and for all, let us end this bizarre, commonsense-defying budget process called fire borrowing that, in effect, has the Federal Government consistently shorting prevention and then having to spend more down the road when we have these enormous fires as a result of the fact that you haven't gone in there to clean out that dead material.

#### HEALTHCARE

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I would like to turn to healthcare. For me, healthcare has always been the most important issue. It goes back to my days when I was director of the Oregon Gray Panthers. I have always felt, as a general proposition, that it is extraordinarily important for us to pursue bipartisan approaches in this space. I have focused on that, and, frankly, I got a lot of welts on my back to show for it.

I was very proud last night to be able to work with Chairman HATCH, and we have, in effect, announced the beginning of an agreement to deal with the Children's Health Insurance Program, a bipartisan approach, and do it in a responsible way. Obviously, there are other steps to go, but I think it reflects, again, a big, important issue in

polarized political times—the Finance Committee trying to find common ground.

The reality is, the principles around which healthcare reform has traditionally been based are still pretty valid. I believe, as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, that healthcare is a basic human right. I also believe our colleagues on the other side of the aisle have valid points as well about having a role for the private sector in the delivery of healthcare. So I have long used those kind of bedrock principles to guide me with respect to healthcare, and that is why I wanted to come to the floor today to talk about what was just announced by Republican Senators—Republican Senators only—to make one last attempt to roll back Americans' healthcare before they lose the opportunity to take advantage of the special rules that would allow partisan-only approaches, and they expire at the end of the month.

As I said, my focus—as was the case last night with Chairman HATCH, and we are far from done here—was to find common ground with respect to a critical program for children.

Earlier today, our colleagues, Senators GRAHAM, Cassidy, and HELLER, introduced a partisan bill that, in my view, might be the most harmful version of TrumpCare yet, so I wanted to take a few minutes this evening to explain why this type of legislation is still a bad deal for American families.

This legislation that has been authored by the three Republican Senators gives a super block grant—a blank check—to the States so that they can do whatever they want to Americans' healthcare. Based on everything else I have seen this year, that is going to mean an awful lot of pain for vulnerable people and an open door to the worst abuses of insurance companies, which had been relegated to the history books when the Affordable Care Act was passed. My view is that this is probably the largest healthcare devolution in history, which is pretty much sending it to the States and saying: Have at it.

First of all, the bill ends Medicaid as Americans know it today. This year's debate over healthcare made one matter clear—that Medicaid matters. It pays for the healthcare of America's most vulnerable and serves as a safety net for the people who might not think they will need it. It covers nursing home care for older Americans who spend down their hard-earned savings. It pays for addiction treatment services for those who are struggling with opioids, as millions of Americans are today. It helps Americans with disabilities live healthy, productive lives in their communities rather than in institutions. That is just the tip of the iceberg of the good work Medicaid does for those from Portland, OR, to Portland, ME. Under the legislation that I am discussing—Graham-Cassidy-Heller—that is gone.

The plan ends the expanded Medicaid coverage that 11 million Americans

count on today. It puts a cap on Medicaid and offers hundreds of billions less in support from the Federal Government. It is essentially telling States "good luck" and is asking them to make all of the hard decisions about which Americans will get adequate healthcare and which people will go without. History tells us that the most vulnerable Americans who are without a voice or a powerful lobby are inevitably going to be the ones worse off.

There is one more step that this bill takes that is different from previous versions of TrumpCare and similar proposals. Rather than reducing the tax credits that help Americans get help, which is similar to earlier Republican approaches, this bill just gets rid of them. It gets rid of them completely. That means asking States to use their Federal health block grants to cover Medicaid, nursing home care, care for those with disabilities, addiction treatment, tax credits for healthcare, and more—and all from the same pot of money. To me, that is a recipe for a healthcare disaster.

This proposal also opens up loopholes for the big insurance companies to undermine key consumer protections—those that bar discrimination against those who have preexisting conditions and set essential benefits that all Americans are entitled to receive.

I thought we were done with those days—the days when, in effect, healthcare worked for the healthy and the wealthy and when we had discrimination against those with preexisting conditions. Basically, unless you were healthy and did not have a preexisting condition or unless you were wealthy and could pay for your healthcare costs, you were really in deep trouble. As far as I can tell, this new proposal undermines those key consumer protections that bar discrimination against those who have preexisting conditions, and it takes us back.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed for up to 10 more minutes.

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

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President and colleagues, thank you for your courtesy.

During the TrumpCare debate, it was clear that unraveling the consumer protections that Americans count on today causes the whole system to come apart at the expense of those who need healthcare the most.

I have heard the authors of this bill argue that the States will be able to keep the Affordable Care Act or do it their own way, but this bill asks each State to do a whole lot more with a whole lot less. That does not sound like a prescription for State innovation; it sounds like more of the same failed, partisan approach that the public witnessed earlier this year.

I know a bit about State innovation and have enjoyed talking with the distinguished President of the Senate about it. I wrote the provision that is

currently in law that says that States have a chance to do better, not worse. What the States have been most interested in up until now is something called reinsurance, and the States that have been making headway in terms of their getting the green light from the Federal Government have used the existing law that I wrote. Yet the idea of letting States do worse is a different story, and it sure looks to me as if we will be seeing benefits cut and insurance plans being worth little more than the paper on which they are written. On top of that, Americans in red States should not be subjected to worse healthcare than those in blue States simply on the basis of their ZIP Codes.

So I come back to the bottom line in terms of bipartisanship in healthcare. I think that the way one makes lasting change in the American healthcare system is to find common ground across the aisle. I talked about some of the key principles behind it. I mentioned the fact that Chairman HATCH and I came together last night on a general framework for the children's health insurance bill.

Now, I have been approached by colleagues about this legislation, so I can only assume that means it is going to be pushed forward through the deeply partisan process known as reconciliation. That did not end well previously, and I am sure going to fight with everything I have to block partisan reconciliation tactics in the days ahead.

I close by saying let's try to pick up on the kind of approach Chairman HATCH and I tried to pursue last night—with a bipartisan effort on CHIP. Let's try to find common ground. I think healthcare is a basic human right. I also think Republicans have valid points with respect to there being a significant role for the private sector. I am interested in approaches that give all Americans the ability to have affordable, good-quality healthcare, and I think that we get it best if we pursue bipartisan approaches. I believe many of my colleagues here in the Senate share these views, and I hope the Senate will not have yet another knockdown, drag-out battle over a partisan reconciliation bill that will harm the American people but will instead pick up on the kind of bipartisan principles I have discussed tonight.

I thank the Presiding Officer and Senator HOEVEN for the courtesy of having the additional time.

I yield the floor.

(At the request of Mr. CORNYN, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

- Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, due to ongoing and urgent recovery efforts from Hurricane Irma, which devastated many parts of Florida, I am staying in my State to assess the damage and help marshal the full capacity of recovery resources available to us. Congress