

The Senate will vote on a critical HUD nomination after lunch, and it is my hope that we can move the cloture vote on NDAA to occur in that stack after lunch.

Our next order of business will be, following the Defense authorization bill, the nomination of the Solicitor General. This is the person in the Justice Department who argues before the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court October term begins shortly.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at 1 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to executive session for the consideration of Calendar No. 109, as under the previous order, and that following disposition of the nomination, the Senate resume legislative session and consideration of H.R. 2810.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 105, Noel Francisco.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Noel J. Francisco, of the District of Columbia, to be Solicitor General of the United States.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Noel J. Francisco, of the District of Columbia, to be Solicitor General of the United States.

Mitch McConnell, John Kennedy, Lamar Alexander, Johnny Isakson, Mike Rounds, Tom Cotton, Roy Blunt, John Barrasso, Patrick J. Toomey, Cory Gardner, John Hoeven, Rob Portman, Bill Cassidy, John Cornyn, Orrin G. Hatch, Lisa Murkowski, Thom Tillis.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCain. Madam President, I thank the majority leader for all the support and assistance we have been given on this issue. Of course, I regret that we finally had to turn to cloture. The fact is that we have incorporated over 100 amendments offered by Senators of both parties, and it means the NDAA becomes stronger as a result of including these amendments. Second, the process took a step in the right direction, as Senators were able to have their voices and opinions heard and reflected in this legislation.

I wish we had never had to come to voting for cloture, but I wish to say that we have made enormous progress. We have had debate. We have had amendments. We have had votes. All of these are the "regular order" that some of us have been arguing for that the U.S. Senate—in accordance with the Constitution of the United States.

I am very appreciative of the cooperation of Members on both sides, including Senator REED. I believe we can be proud of our product. It came down to about four amendments on which we could never get agreement to move forward—that compared to the over 100 amendments we were able to adopt.

I still wish we had been able to go completely through this process without having to resort to cloture, but I do want to thank Members on both sides—as we approach cloture—for their cooperation, for their involvement, for their engagement, and for their dedication to the men and women who are serving us in the military.

We look forward to the next hours. We will have debate and hopefully some amendments proposed, vote cloture, and have it completed sometime early next week. The work that needs to be done will be done, accomplished before then.

I thank all my colleagues for their participation. I thank them for their engagement and involvement. I am proud of this product, which comes after hundreds of hours of hearings, of negotiation, of discussion, and of debate, because it proves that the first priority of Members on both sides of the aisle is the men and women in the military and their ability to defend the Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I want to join the chairman with respect to noting the progress we have made with respect to 100 amendments. They have been bipartisan. They have been carefully weighed by the staff.

We are still continuing to work together to see if there are additional

amendments we can incorporate before we conclude this bill. I think the amendments have strengthened the bill. I think it does reflect the bipartisan effort.

Also, along with the chairman, we would have liked to have been able to do more and have more debate, more votes, but at the end of the day, we are going to have a national defense authorization bill that responds to current threats, that responds to the stresses and demands on our personnel across the globe, and also be well positioned to go into conference and hopefully further improve this legislation in the conference process.

Once again, I will say this is in large part the result of Chairman McCain's leadership—creating an atmosphere of bipartisan cooperation, of thoughtful debate, and doing it in a way that brings out the best in all of us. I thank him for that.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Sasse). Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Pamela Hughes Patenaude, of New Hampshire, to be Deputy Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 40 minutes of debate, equally divided between the two sides in the usual form.

The Senator from Oregon.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. Merkley. Mr. President, the most important words in our Constitution are the first three words: "We the People." That is the mission statement for the United States of America. It is written in big, bold, beautiful letters so that even from across the room, if you can't read the details, you know what our Nation is all about. As President Lincoln summarized, a Nation "of the people, by the people, for the people."

What we have seen this year is quite an assault on this vision of government of, by, and for the people. It came in the form of President Trump's plan to rip healthcare from millions of Americans in order to deliver billions of dollars to the very richest among us—plan after plan, version after version, wiping out healthcare for 24 million, wiping out healthcare for 23 million, wiping out healthcare for 32 million, and so on and so forth, always over 20 million, and always delivering this enormous gift of hundreds of billions of dollars to the richest Americans.

You look at this from a little bit of distance, and it is just incredible to imagine that this could have occurred—that any member, a single member of our Nation would possibly

have supported such an outrageous, diabolical, dangerous, damaging plan to the quality of life for so many people across our Nation.

It wasn't just that it ripped healthcare from more than 20 million people. It wasn't just that it delivered billions of dollars to the wealthiest among us. It also ensured that those with preexisting conditions wouldn't be able to get care. It was also that it would have raised our premiums an estimated 20 percent for those who were able to secure insurance.

If one set out to design the worst possible healthcare plan you could ever imagine, you probably couldn't come up with one as bad as President Trump and the Republican team came up with. It seems incredible that we are still debating the basic premise of whether healthcare should be part of a standard foundation for families to thrive here in this century. Every other developed nation understands that healthcare is so essential to quality of life, so essential for our children to thrive, so essential for our families to succeed that they make sure that, just by virtue of living in a country, you have that healthcare.

Well, I have to salute the millions of Americans who weighed in to say that this diabolical plan needed to be dumped. They filled our streets and overflowed our inboxes and flooded our phones. They made it perfectly clear that healthcare is a basic human right, not a privilege reserved for the healthy and the wealthy. I certainly agree with them. We decided collectively that we were not going to allow this diabolical plan to undo the progress we made. We made significant progress with ObamaCare. After decades of being essentially unable to change the uninsured rate, we made significant progress. There we are with a big drop in the uninsured rate—a big increase in the number of people who have access to healthcare. But we are not in that place yet where this number drops to zero. We still have 10 percent of our country that doesn't have insurance. The costs are still too high, and the deductibles and copays are too high. One out of five Americans can still not afford their prescriptions.

In addition, we have this incredibly complicated set of healthcare systems. We have Medicare and Medicaid. We have on-exchange, and we have off-exchange. We have the Children's Health Insurance Program. We have workers' compensation. We have self-insurance. We have a multitude of varieties of healthcare through the workplace—some covering just the individual, others covering the entire family, some covering just a small percent of the healthcare costs and some more. Some are certainly so complicated that even the folks who have them aren't sure what the insurance company should pay.

So we found in this conversation with Americans about healthcare that Americans weighed in very strongly

about the stresses and the challenges of ordinary Americans to secure healthcare. It is an ongoing lifelong effort. Do you have an employer who covers you but not your children? Can you get them on the Children's Health Insurance Program? Do you have an insurance plan at work that you have to contribute to, but the costs of contributing are so high that you really can't afford it? Do you opt out of that? Then, what happens? Or perhaps you are under Medicaid—up to 138 percent of the poverty level for those States that have expanded Medicaid—and you gain a small increase in your pay and maybe now you don't qualify. In the middle of the year, can you apply to the healthcare exchange? Will you get tax credits credited to you or will you have to pay a big sum at the end of the year when your taxes are reconciled? It is continuous applications, continuous change, and continuous stress. Why do we make it that hard?

In my 36 town halls a year—one in every county in Oregon, mostly in red counties because most of the counties in Oregon are red counties—I have had people coming out yearning for a simple, seamless system that says: Just by virtue of being an American, you have healthcare when you need it and you will not end up bankrupt. What is that vision all about? It is about taking an existing model, one that has worked so well for our seniors—the model of Medicare.

Folks used to come to my town halls and they would say: I am just trying to stay alive until I reach age 65 so that I can be part of that wonderful healthcare plan—that Medicare plan. So this is a well-known commodity. I have heard some of my colleagues mocking it in the last few days. Well, certainly, maybe they should get out and have town halls. Maybe they should talk to our seniors about how well this system works. Maybe they should recognize that the overhead costs are much lower—2 percent versus 20 percent, and sometimes much more in private insurance healthcare. That is more than a fifth of our healthcare dollars simply wasted—a waste that disappears with Medicare for All.

This is the type of healthcare system that addresses and changes this enormous, fractured, and stressful system. We currently spend twice as much as other developed nations per person on healthcare—twice as much as France, twice as much as Canada, twice as much as Germany, and the list goes on. Yet the healthcare we receive provides less health in America than in those countries.

We should be ashamed that our infant mortality rates are higher, even though we spend twice as many dollars per capita as those other countries. So it is clear that there is significant room for improvement. By the way, there are so many opportunities to move in this direction.

We laid out this Medicare for All plan, and I salute my colleague BERNIE

SANDERS and my additional cosponsors. There are now 17 Senators who have said: We are cosponsors to this because we know that it addresses the fractured, stressful nature of our system. We know it is more cost-effective than our current system. We know that it will lead to greater peace of mind than our current system.

Shouldn't peace of mind be what we are all about? That is the peace of mind that if your loved one gets ill or injured, they will get the care they need. The peace of mind that if your loved one is in an accident, they will get the care they need and you will not end up bankrupt.

It is time for America to have this conversation, and it is my intention, certainly, to have this conversation with the citizens of Oregon and to encourage my colleagues to have this conversation with their citizens. How can we move to a system where you can stop worrying about whether you will get the care you need, whether your loved ones will get the care they need, and that you will not end up bankrupt when you are sick or injured? That is the goal.

Let's have that conversation, America, and keep pushing toward making it a reality. I am proud to sponsor this bill. I certainly am proud to fight for quality affordable healthcare for every single American because it is a basic human right.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

CONGRATULATING THE WATERTOWN HIGH SCHOOL FIELD HOCKEY PROGRAM

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, before I start my remarks on the dangers of nuclear war, I want to take a moment to congratulate the Watertown High School field hockey program in Massachusetts.

Up until this past week, the Watertown Raiders had not lost a single field hockey game since November 12, 2008. For nearly 9 years, the Raiders have been truly perfect. Their 184-game winning streak was our Nation's longest in high school field hockey history. Their leader, Head Coach Eileen Donahue, is one of the most historic figures in Massachusetts high school athletics.

To all the former and current players, coaches, parents and supporters, I offer my congratulations on this incredible accomplishment.

Go, Watertown Raiders. Congratulations on a historic streak of victories.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Mr. President, now on the issue of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons give the President of the United States an unprecedented and awesome power. Nuclear weapons are the most destructive force in human history. Yet, under existing laws, the President of the United States possesses unilateral authority to launch them. If the President wants to, he has the power to initiate an offensive nuclear war, even if there is no attack on the United States or its allies. This is simply unconstitutional,