

islandwide grid is down. This is something our committee has been keenly focused on—the application of microgrids and how they might be better utilized.

I would note on this matter that the urban area of Mayaguez is currently receiving power from the hydro-gas plant that is located within its municipality. It is essentially its own microgrid. But the damaged transmission lines prevent electricity from moving to other municipalities across the island.

There are other considerations, including the role that distributed generation plays. Can these Federal entities work with the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority, PREPA, to develop a demonstration project for the island that would make the grid more efficient, more reliable, reduce the cost of electricity to consumers? These are all things that need to be considered. We had a hearing in the Energy Committee this morning on energy storage technologies, and it was mentioned there that regional technology demonstrations might be particularly helpful for Puerto Rico at this time.

I intend to visit Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands with other Members a few weeks from now. We know President Trump is there today. We are going to wait until the situation has stabilized just a bit more to allow for these relief efforts to continue. When we have an opportunity to observe the situation ourselves, I think it is worth noting that we will, on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, be holding a hearing on the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and I anticipate we will be doing that in the coming weeks. We want to look at not only the damage caused and where recovery efforts stand but also lessons learned as well as opportunities moving forward as to how we can rebuild Puerto Rico's electric grid to better than it was before so it does have a resiliency and it does have a sustainability that I think is imperative moving forward.

We recognize that the islands have faced a real tragedy in this natural disaster, but, from this, can we work quickly to stabilize things in the short term but allow this to be an opportunity to think about Puerto Rico's long-term energy future—an energy future that is more resilient and is more sustainable.

So our thoughts and prayers are with all who were impacted by these incredibly powerful storms as they dig out, as they rebuild, as they restart their lives, and just as we will take care of the people of Texas and Louisiana and Florida, I want to make sure the people of Puerto Rico and the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands know we stand united with them during these exceptionally difficult times and that we will work with them as partners to make their islands stronger, more resilient, and better prepared for whatever the future may bring them.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I would like to start by thanking Senator MURKOWSKI for her leadership as chairman of the Natural Resources Committee, on which I also serve, in addressing some of the long-term needs of Puerto Rico.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, the American people are relieved that the latest version of TrumpCare went down in defeat last week. We won this battle because millions of people made their voices heard, but the danger remains. We cannot grow complacent.

The President and his allies in Congress are hoping that in our relief, we will move on and pay attention to other things. With this President, I have to say, and this administration, there is always a fresh outrage to contend with. After his latest failure, the President has turned to sabotage and neglect to accomplish his goal of denying millions of people access to healthcare under the Affordable Care Act.

The danger is real. The President's continued threats to eliminate cost-sharing reduction payments that help reduce out-of-pocket costs for consumers under the ACA, for example, are already destabilizing health insurance in Hawaii and across the country.

This year, HMSA and Kaiser—two of Hawaii's largest providers of health insurance—proposed large rate increases for customers on the exchange in response to the uncertainty posed by the President's threats to eliminate the cost-sharing payments. These companies have been told to submit two rate proposals, one if cost-sharing remains in place and the other if these cost-sharing provisions are eliminated.

If the President eliminates cost-sharing payments, Hawaii residents could see an 8-percent increase in their premiums on the individual markets. This translates into millions of dollars more that Hawaii residents will need to pay. This is irresponsible, unacceptable, and completely within the President's power to prevent.

Unfortunately, the President isn't the only member of his administration intent on sabotaging the Affordable Care Act. The Secretary of Health and Human Services resigned in disgrace last week, but the work he set in motion at the Department to make it more difficult for people to sign up for insurance continues apace.

The administration has already shortened the open enrollment period from 90 days to 45 days and proposed massive cuts for advertising and call centers during this shortened window. To make matters worse, they are taking healthcare.gov down for so-called maintenance at peak times on the weekends so people have even less time to sign up for coverage.

The sabotage doesn't end there. The administration is also calling for a 40-

percent cut in funding for navigators who help vulnerable communities find and secure coverage. In the past, organizations in Hawaii like We Are Oceania and the Legal Aid Society have received navigator grants to help enroll low-income Hawaii residents, COFA citizens, individuals with disabilities, and other underserved communities in programs under the ACA.

Last week, I had the opportunity to meet with Josie Howard, We Are Oceania's program director. Josie and her team navigate a multitude of language and cultural barriers to help COFA citizens who have been unfairly disqualified from Medicaid to enroll in the exchange. President Trump's determination to sabotage the ACA undermines the hard work Josie and organizations like We Are Oceania are doing to expand healthcare access to underserved communities.

We need to keep fighting back against the President's sabotage campaign, but we can also work together in Congress to improve our Nation's healthcare system and renew programs that millions of people depend on every year in our country.

On Saturday, Congress allowed funding for the Community Health Center Fund—CHCF—to lapse without being renewed. CHCs across the country will be forced to lay off staff, reduce hours of operations, scale back investments, or even close, denying healthcare coverage or services to millions of people in need all across the country.

Through the ACA, the CHCF provided increased funding for community health centers across the country to modernize facilities, hire new staff, and expand services in underrepresented communities. If Congress does not renew the program, community health centers will face a 70-percent cut in their Federal funding, and this will have a devastating impact for community health centers in Hawaii, like Malama I Ke Ola in Wailuku on Maui.

Thanks to the CHCF funding and the ACA's Medicaid expansion, Malama I Ke Ola has been able to expand the services it provides to Maui residents and improve outcomes for thousands of people—particularly in the area of women's health.

In the years following the passage and implementation of the ACA, Malama I Ke Ola has worked to expand OB-GYN services at the clinic. With increased funding, the clinic has purchased new, high-definition ultrasound machines, hired new physicians, and upgraded its prenatal care facilities. The center recently signed a new contract with the University of Hawaii to provide overnight fetal medical services at the clinic instead of having to refer patients to large public hospitals on Oahu. Keeping these patients on Maui not only reduces overall healthcare spending but also allows patients to stay close to home and their families.

If Congress does not renew CHCF funding, this program—and hundreds of

others across the State and country—will be at risk.

Congressional inaction has also threatened the future of the Children's Health Insurance Program—or CHIP—which provides health insurance to 9 million low-income children and mothers across the country and 27,000 in Hawaii. We should act as soon as possible to pass a bipartisan reauthorization that Senators HATCH and WYDEN negotiated in the Senate Finance Committee.

It seems as though every day the President tweets something new and outrageous to distract us from the true issues facing our country, whether it is the Mueller investigation or his decision to rescind DACA and place hundreds of thousands of DACA Dreamers at risk for deportation. This is a tactic the President has used to great effect during our many debates on healthcare. The President hopes we will be paying more attention to his attacks on NFL players or demeaning comments about the mayor of San Juan instead of his dangerous proposals to take healthcare away from millions of people in our country. We have to keep paying attention and keep our eyes on the ball. We have to keep speaking up and fighting back.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE BUDGET

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, after failing to throw 32 million Americans off of the health insurance they currently have last week, the Republicans are continuing their attack against the working families of our country with one of the most destructive budgets in American history.

I know the American people today, for very good reason, are preoccupied with the horror of what happened in Las Vegas, and people are horrified about what has happened in Puerto Rico, but I would beg of the American people to please pay attention to the budget proposal and the so-called tax reform ideas brought by the Republican leadership in the Senate, as well as in the House.

This proposal would cause devastating economic pain for tens of millions of Americans by, on the one hand, giving incredibly large tax breaks for the wealthiest people in the country, while at the same time making it harder for our children to get a decent education, harder for the families of this country to get the healthcare they need, harder for families, literally, to put food on the table, harder to protect our environment, and harder for the elderly to live their retirement years with dignity.

This is the Robin Hood proposal in reverse. The Robin Hood principle in reverse is that instead of taking from the rich to help the poor, this proposal makes massive cuts in programs desperately needed by the middle class and working families of our country, precisely to give unbelievably large tax breaks to the people on top—the people who least need those tax breaks.

At a time of massive income and wealth inequality, where we have more inequality today than at any time since the 1920s and more inequality than almost any major country on Earth, where the very, very rich are becoming much richer and we have 40 million people living in poverty and tens of millions of middle-class families are going nowhere in a hurry, this Republican budget, according to the Tax Policy Center, at the end of 10 years, would provide 80 percent of the tax benefits to the top 1 percent.

Right now, today, the rich are doing phenomenally well. Everybody understands that. The middle class is shrinking. But according to the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, by the end of the decade, nearly 80 percent of the tax benefits in the Republican plan would go to the top 1 percent—under this plan, this Republican plan. The top one-tenth of 1 percent, the richest of the rich, would receive a tax break of over \$1 million a year.

At a time when so many of our families are struggling to put food on the table, struggling to figure out how to send their kids to college, struggling to figure out how to pay for childcare, we have a Republican tax proposal that would provide trillions of dollars in tax breaks to the richest people in this country.

This is a budget that would increase the Federal deficit by \$1.5 trillion over the next decade. We have heard on the Senate floor my Republican friends talking about how worried they are about the \$20 trillion national debt and how high the deficits are. This proposal, designed to give tax breaks to the wealthiest people in this country, would increase the Federal deficit by \$1.5 trillion over the next decade, and, by the way, this is a conservative estimate. There are those who think the deficit would go up a lot more than that.

This is a Republican proposal that eliminates the estate tax. What is the estate tax? Republicans name it the “death tax,” but let us be clear about what this tax is and who benefits from it. Despite Republican efforts trying to find farmers or ranchers who would benefit from it, this is not legislation designed to help farmers or ranchers. This is legislation designed to help the top two-tenths of 1 percent. So 99.8 percent of the American people will not benefit one nickel from the repeal of the estate tax. Only the wealthiest of the wealthy will benefit. If this Republican proposal to repeal the estate tax would go through, the Walton family of Walmart, the wealthiest family in

America, would receive a tax cut of up to \$52 billion.

Does anybody for one second think that, at a time when so many of our people are struggling and when we have a \$20 trillion national debt, we should be passing legislation that gives the wealthiest family in this country up to a \$52 billion tax break by repealing the estate tax?

But it is not just the Walton family, of course. This is a budget that says that if you are the second wealthiest family in America, the Koch brothers—and this, by the way, is just coincidental, no doubt. I know it is amazing how these coincidences take place. The Koch brothers are a family who contributed hundreds of millions of dollars year after year to the Republican Party to elect candidates who represent the wealthy and powerful. Just coincidentally, that family would receive a tax break of up to \$38 billion.

People ask why the Koch brothers are contributing hundreds of millions of dollars every campaign cycle. That is a huge amount of money. That is a huge amount of money for normal families, but when you are the second wealthiest family and you have a tax break of \$38 billion, contributing a few million dollars every campaign cycle is pocket change and is a good investment.

This is a budget that will cut Medicare by \$450 billion. Right now in this country, we have millions and millions of seniors who are struggling to make ends meet. They can't afford their prescription drugs. They can't afford to keep their homes warm in the wintertime. Yet this Republican budget would cut Medicare by \$450 billion.

Now, the Republicans tried, time after time, despite massive opposition from the American people, to repeal the Affordable Care Act. In every one of their pieces of legislation, they made devastating cuts in Medicaid. Well, they are back again. Ostensibly, this is not a healthcare piece of legislation. It is a budget. It is so-called tax reform. There is \$1 trillion of cuts in the Medicaid Program. So if you were worried last week, 2 weeks ago, and 1 month ago about what the terrific Republican healthcare bills would do, stay worried because this bill will cut \$1 trillion over 10 years in Medicaid, resulting in at least 15 million Americans losing their health insurance.

Can you imagine a set of priorities that says that we are going to throw 15 million people off of health insurance in order to give tens of billions of dollars in tax breaks to the wealthiest families in this country? Unbelievable.

It really is unbelievable.

This proposal not only adds to the deficit, not only makes massive cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, it also impacts the American people in many ways. We have a program in this country called the Women, Infants, and Children Program, and at a time when the United States has the highest rate of infant mortality of any major country on