

It is all a fraud. It is simply a mailbox address for 20,000 corporations that are in this building in order to avoid paying their taxes. They are stashing their profits and their wealth in corporations that use this building as a mailing address.

I know we are busy talking about so-called tax reform here, but in the United States alone, offshore tax evasion costs our government about \$166 billion in lost revenue each and every year. That is a lot of money that could be used to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure—our roads, our bridges, our water systems. One trillion dollars—that is 8 or 9 years of that \$166 billion—could create up to 15 million good-paying jobs. That is money that could be used to provide universal pre-K for our children so that when kids get ready to go to school, they will be prepared to do the work there. But instead of cracking down on offshore tax schemes, President Trump and my Republican colleagues in Congress are working overtime to pass legislation that would make this absurd situation even worse.

At a time when corporations are making recordbreaking profits, my Republican colleagues want to slash taxes for companies that are shifting American jobs to China and American profits to the Cayman Islands. At a time of massive wealth and income inequality, President Trump and the Republicans in Congress want to cut taxes for billionaires by repealing the estate tax on families who inherit over \$5.5 million. I think the American people grasp the unfairness and the absurdity of the Republican tax proposal.

The top one-tenth of 1 percent own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. The very, very rich are getting richer while the middle class is shrinking, and the Republican response is to give massive tax breaks to the top two-tenths of 1 percent—two-tenths of 1 percent. These are families like the Walton family, the wealthiest family in America, who owns Walmart, who would get up to a \$50 billion tax break; and the Koch brothers, who have enough money to spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to elect rightwing candidates to Congress.

There are massive tax breaks for billionaires and at the same time, an effort to throw up to 30 million people off of the health insurance they have, massive cuts in education, in nutrition, and in the programs that working families desperately need.

Instead of providing even more tax breaks to very profitable corporations and to billionaires and President Trump's Cabinet, maybe—just maybe—it might be a good idea to close offshore tax loopholes and demand a fair, transparent, and progressive tax system.

I hope the American people are catching on—as I believe they are—to what a fraud the Republican tax proposal is. Today, one out of five major, profitable corporations already pays zero in Federal income tax. You can't

do much better than paying zero in Federal income tax and be a profitable corporation, but that is what is going on. Republicans want to make that even worse, and then they want millions of middle-class people, by the end of the decade, to be paying more in taxes. That is absurd, and I hope the American people stand up and demand that we do not go forward with that proposal.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, on another issue, I want to mention that there is a crisis in primary healthcare, and unless Congress acts immediately, that crisis is likely to become much worse. Millions of Americans are at risk of losing their access to healthcare because Congress has still not renewed funding for the community health center program, which expired on September 30.

Our Nation's community health centers provide affordable, high-quality healthcare to more than 27 million people. What community health centers do is not only provide high-quality primary healthcare but also dental care, mental health counseling, and low-cost prescription drugs. Community health centers not only save lives, they also end up saving money. What they do is keep people out of emergency rooms and keep people out of hospitals because people can now go to the doctor when they should. The savings are also, really, quite significant. Investing in community health centers keeps people healthier, keeps people alive, and saves taxpayers' money.

Not only do we have to renew funding for the Community Health Center Program, but we must also improve and expand the National Health Service Corps, one of the, really, very positive health programs that the Federal Government runs. What this program understands is that for a variety of reasons, including the fact that many young people leave medical school being \$300,000, \$400,000 in debt, it is very hard to get young doctors, dentists, nurses, and nurse practitioners to underserved areas in rural America or in urban America. What this program does is provide debt forgiveness and sometimes scholarships for young graduates of medical school or nursing school or dental school and says: If you are prepared to practice in an underserved area, we will forgive your loans. That is a big deal in attracting providers to areas in which we desperately need them.

The bad news is that, as every American knows, this Congress and this country are very politically divided. That is no great secret. The good news and the truth is that in terms of community health centers—Senator Ted Kennedy was one of the founders, who worked with Republicans—from the inception of the program, there has been a widespread understanding on both sides of the aisle that communities all over America in every State in our country are benefiting from community health centers whether they are in

rural areas or whether they are in urban areas or anyplace else in between.

What I am very happy to note is that there is excellent legislation—bipartisan legislation—here in the Senate, introduced by Senator ROY BLUNT and Senator DEBBIE STABENOW, that would reauthorize these successful programs for 5 years and provide modest increases in their funding. This program not only has the support of virtually, perhaps, every Democrat or every Member of the Democratic Caucus, but I think it has at least 9 or 10 Republican cosponsors. I believe, if that bill were to be brought to the floor of the Senate, it would pass with overwhelming support because every Senator here knows of the excellent work that is done by community health centers from one end of this country to the other.

I hope that this issue will get the attention it deserves. It should have been funded at the end of the fiscal year. It wasn't. I just talked to a physician in Burlington, VT, who works for a community health center. They are worried, and doctors and nurses all across this country are worried, as are patients, about the lack of reauthorization of this very important bill.

I hope that this bill will get moved very quickly along with the CHIP program. There is bipartisan support for it, and I hope that we can get it to the floor and get it passed as quickly as possible.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

VETERANS DAY

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, this coming week will mark Veterans Day. It is an important time for us to reflect on what veterans do for us and what their families do for us. The sacrifices of both those who serve and those who support those who serve are incredibly important.

We have half a million Missouri veterans, and one of the great privileges of this job is to get to represent them, their values, and the commitment to freedom in our country that they stand for.

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to welcome a group of southwest Missouri veterans who came to Washington with the Honor Flight program. I think the Presiding Officer also does this, but every time I get a chance, if there is an Honor Flight from our State, I try to get down there because it is a great time to see and to talk to and to thank those who have served us.

When the Honor Flights started 20 years ago or so, there were still some

World War I veterans coming, and then they were almost all World War II veterans. Today we see some World War II veterans, Korea veterans, and Vietnam veterans, all of whom serve in the great tradition of being willing to fight for the freedoms that we enjoy every day. I find it humbling and gratifying to know that those veterans get to come here and enjoy the day with each other. In many cases it is the first time they have ever been to the Capitol, the National World War II Memorial, Arlington, and the other places on the trip that now so many tens of thousands have taken.

Many of those veterans whom I saw the other day and whom I have seen through the history of the Honor Flight program were just teenagers when they answered the call to serve—basically, a little more than high school kids who knew that something needed to be done and they were able and willing to do it. They fought difficult battles and, in some cases, often under unbearable conditions. Some of them lost their closest friends in the military. Many of them lost comrades in arms. Some of them lost comrades right beside them. Some of them lost people who went out on another mission and never came back. Some of their families lost a servicemember who never became a veteran.

I was down in Perryville, MO, a little town between Cape Girardeau and St. Louis, on the Mississippi River. They are building an exact replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—the Vietnam wall. We were able to present a flag to the group that raised the money and made the plan to replicate the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall to take it back and become part of the Vietnam memorial at Perryville.

Our veterans are an extraordinary group of men and women. They really stand for the best we stand for as a nation. It is important that with not just honor them on Veterans Day but honor them every day—every day that we live in this free and prosperous Nation that they helped defend.

Admittedly, it is hard not to take all of the freedoms that we enjoy for granted because generations of Americans have been willing to fight and die to protect those freedoms. Because of that, generations of Americans have benefitted from those freedoms, and it seems to us the way people should be able to live everywhere. Maybe too often we think it is the way people do live everywhere, but in many parts of the world, having the security to walk out the door every morning, to drop your kids off at school, to go to work and earn a living, to worship as you please, and to build a better life is not available to people in other countries the way it is here. That is the debt of gratitude we owe to our veterans.

This year, one of the areas of great legislative success has been in the work for veterans. Chairman ISAKSON of Georgia is going to follow me on the floor in just a few minutes. He is the

chairman of that committee. He has a great committee, but they have a great chairman. That committee, with its chairman, and the committee in the House have passed eight bills, at least, that the President of the United States has signed into law that do a number of things for our veterans.

We have built on previous progress for improving veterans care. A few years ago, we made the decision that veterans need to have more choices. A veteran shouldn't have to drive by a hospital they would like to go to in order to get to a hospital miles and miles away. They shouldn't have to pass three or four facilities that could do as good a job or better in order to get to a veterans facility.

There are some things our veterans facilities should do better than anybody else. They should be better at dealing with post-traumatic stress better than anybody else, although they may not be as accessible. They should be better at dealing with patients who have suffered from IED attacks, eye injuries, people who work with veterans in prosthetics, and those patients who have lost arms and legs in the service of our country. They should be pretty good at that. There is no particular reason they should be good at open heart surgery or kidney dialysis or all the other things you go to the hospital for, if that is where a veteran wants to go. We found out that a lot of veterans would rather go closer to home. A lot of veterans would like to go to the hospital they are more familiar with when they need their own healthcare. They would like to go to the hospital they have been to lots of times with other family members and others.

So we really expanded the Veterans Choice Program and expanded the money available for that program. We try to create these opportunities side by side with an existing facility. There has to be some startup money involved, but, eventually, I think our young veterans will find that they can almost always find a hospital they would rather go to or a doctor they would rather see.

We have increased compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities. World War II veterans, such as Arla Harrell from St. Louis, who suffered a lifetime of illness because he was part of a mustard gas experiment, is finally getting both compensation and the recognition that throughout his lifetime his health was impacted by something that happened while he was serving his country.

We have continued efforts to address the problems at the Veterans' Administration by passing legislation to modernize the outdated benefits claims appeals process to make it easier for VA employees to be fired for misconduct.

We want to protect employees who point out what is wrong. There have been plenty of whistles being blown at the VA over the last decade. While we want to be sure people can blow those whistles, we also want to be sure that the VA can quickly and effectively re-

move employees who are not doing what they ought to be doing and, in fact, are aggressively doing, in some cases, things they shouldn't be doing.

We worked to expand the possibility and the opportunity for education benefits by expanding what can happen under the post-9/11 GI bill, helping to connect veterans with employers who provide benefits and programs. The HIRE Vets Act, a bill I sponsored in the Congress, was part of the first major pieces of legislation the Congress passed this year. I think that, sometime in the next few weeks, the Department of Labor is going to be talking about how we will recognize and evaluate employers who hire veterans, who give veterans credit for skills they learned in the military, and who promote veterans. To every employer who hires veterans, that is a good thing and we should want to do that. The HIRE Vets Act, like the LEED standard for energy, creates a standard so that we can recognize companies that do that in a significant way. I am pleased that Secretary Acosta in the Department of Labor has put that on a fast track so these companies can be recognized for what they do.

Our veterans have worked hard and have put themselves in danger to keep us safe. As legislators, we owe them, as we owe those who follow in their footsteps, our continued efforts to ensure that those defending our country have everything they need and to show that we are also grateful to those who have defended our country in the past.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

MR. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I wish to thank Senator BLUNT, the distinguished Senator from Missouri, for his eloquent remarks on veterans and in support of all the things the Presiding Officer and I have tried to do on the Veterans' Affairs Committee and for pointing out the many reasons we in America are so proud of the veterans in service, who allow you and I to be here today. Were it not for our veterans, this Republic would not exist.

I was wondering how I would start out this speech. I did an interview with a reporter who wanted to ask me a number of questions about the current administration and what we were doing for veterans. It turned out to be a 35- or 40-minute interview.

I said I had to go, and he said: I have one more question for you.

This was by phone. So I couldn't look him in the eye, and he couldn't see me.

He said: I have one more question for you.

When you hear that from a reporter, that means the zinger is coming.

He said: Don't you think we could save a lot of money if we didn't fight in any more wars?

I thought for a minute. I said: We probably could, but there wouldn't be any reason for you and me to exist if we didn't fight any more wars, because

America is the place where everybody wants to be because we are safe and we are free and we are independent, because we fight and defend what we have as a country. I thought I would bring that up in my speech today because that is the reason we celebrate veterans today. So we give thanks to the men and women who volunteer, who served our country in the wars overseas, in the battles overseas, and, sometimes, in the challenges domestically to protect us and keep us free.

America is a great country. We don't find anybody trying to break out of the United States of America. They are all trying to break in and for a very good reason. It is a safe and free place to raise a family, to start a business, and to serve in many other ways.

So this year, on the 11th day, at the 11th hour and the 11th minute of November, when we celebrate Veterans Day, pause for a minute to say thanks for those who have come and gone and for those who are still here who fight to serve and protect us.

Always remember that the Congress, shortly after the end of World War I, decided that the 11th day—the day the armistice was signed—of the 11th month, November, with the 11th hour being 11 o'clock in the morning, would be the time the bell would toll to celebrate and pay tribute to those veterans. So at 11:11:11 this November 11, we are all going to toll that bell one more time to give thanks for our veterans for all they have done for us and for all they will do for us in the future.

It is best, when you talk about veterans, to talk about them as the people they were and the people they are, whether they are alive or whether they have passed on. I want to talk about two veterans whose paths have crossed my life to point out why we owe them so much and why we have so much to be thankful for. One of them is Jackson Elliott Cox, III of Burke County, GA, which is the Bird Dog Capital of North America. It has raised and trained more bird dogs than anywhere else in the country. It is the home of a nuclear power plant, the Plant Vogtle. It is a beautiful rural county in Georgia.

Jack was my best friend in college. We met in 1962; we graduated in 1966. I will never forget that the last time I saw Jack was when he was shipping out to go to OCS in the Marine Corps. Jack had decided when he graduated that it was more important for him to volunteer and fight for our country because of what was going on in Vietnam than do anything else, so he voluntarily joined the Marine Corps, went to OCS, got his commission as an officer, and became a captain in the U.S. Marine Corps. He fought and he died in Vietnam.

I will never forget the last words he told me when we put him on the bus from Waynesboro, GA, to Atlanta, ultimately, to be shipped out. What he said is: Johnny, I am sure I am coming back. Don't worry about me. Just pray for me. But in case I don't, make sure

people remember who Jackson Elliott Cox III was.

I said: Jack, I will do that.

Sure enough, 2 years later he was shot and killed by a sniper in Vietnam. He lost his life at the age of 24. He was the finest human being I had ever known, the nicest guy I had ever met, and my favorite friend in all of my life. He was taken from me because he volunteered to serve and fight for our country.

I am going to keep today on the floor of the U.S. Senate the promise I made to him at the bus station. I want you to know who Jackson Elliott Cox III was. He was a good old country boy from South Georgia who volunteered to serve his country and risked his life and gave his life so that you and I could be here today.

There are thousands of Jackson Elliott Coxes all over the world. In fact, there are millions all over the country. There are hundreds of thousands of them, and we have so much to thank them for because less than 1 percent of our population has worn the uniform, been in the battle, and fought to save us and protect us as Jackson Elliott Cox did.

When you have your chance to meet and become friends with a veteran—and all of you will—remember you owe them a debt of gratitude. At some time, when you get the chance to pay that debt back, do what I am doing today. Don't let their memory ever be lost or forgotten no matter where you go or where life takes you because you wouldn't get to where you are going, had they not allowed you to be safe and free to travel that route.

The second name I am going to mention is Noah Harris. Noah was from Ellijay, GA. Noah was a cheerleader at the University of Georgia. On September 11, 2001, he turned on his television to see 3,000 innocent citizens, most of them Americans, die in the Twin Towers when al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden and the axis of evil attacked our country, took our innocence, killed our people, and changed the world forever.

Noah was a cheerleader. We don't have a mandatory draft anymore. You don't have to serve, and he was not serving. He was going to graduate in a year and a half. He wanted to be an architect.

The next morning, after 9/11, when he left his dorm, he went to the Army ROTC building at the University of Georgia campus. He walked in and said: I want to go to OCS. I want to go. After what I saw on TV last night, I want to go fight and get the people who did that to my country and my friends.

They said: No, Mr. Harris you can't do that. OCS is a 2-year program at the university, and you are graduating next year. You don't have enough time to do it.

He said: I will double up on my studies. I will do whatever. I want to go. I want to fight for my country and fight the axis of evil.

They let him in, and he did. He graduated with honors. A few months later, he graduated as second lieutenant from the U.S. Army at Fort Benning in Georgia. Before too long, he was in Gazaria in Iraq, a suburb of Baghdad, handing Beanie Babies out of one pocket while the other pocket of his field jacket had his ammunition. He was trying to win over the hearts of the Iraqi children while he was fighting to preserve freedom for them and return their country to some form of a democracy or republic, away from the captives of Saddam Hussein.

I knew Noah casually. I know his parents well—Rick and Lucy Harris. I know they have mourned every day since they lost Noah in Baghdad when he died in an IED accident, but I know how proud they are of what he did and why he did it. I am proud he was my friend, and I am proud to have known him as well. I am proud to be able to stand on the floor of the U.S. Senate today and talk about Noah Harris and talk about Jackson Elliott Cox, who were exemplary of all the others who have served in the military—men and women, rich and poor, Black and White, who have gone and fought the battle and borne the battle for us so that we could be where we are today.

It kind of reminds me of the person who went to Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia shortly after the Constitution was adopted in Constitution Hall and said: Mr. Franklin, what have you given us?

He paused for a minute and said: "A republic, if you can keep it."

We have kept it. We have kept it because we have subscribed to the Constitution but also because we have a militia and a military. We are willing to fight for what we believe in, protect our citizens, and keep our country free. The country that our Founding Fathers gave to us, that was nurtured in the early days of this Republic, which now is hundreds of years old, is still there today for lots of reasons but, principally, the undergirding foundation is a strong and vibrant military.

When Veterans Day comes, give thanks for the veterans you know. Mention a couple of them, as I have done here, so their memory and their names never die, but also so we can lift them up at a time when we pause for just a minute to say thank you for the greatest country on the face of this Earth.

Senator BLUNT talked about our committee and what we have done this year. I want to take just a minute to reiterate some of the things he said. There are no Democratic veterans and no Republican veterans; there are only American veterans. They don't go to the battlefield as a partisan; they go to the battlefield as an American, and they fight for us whether we are Republicans or Democrats. They risk their own life and sometimes sacrifice it so that we can do what Ben Franklin said: Keep that republic. We owe them a lot. In fact, in many cases, we owe them everything.

We have had a mess at the VA in the last 10 years. They have been the lead story on USA Today more than any other agency in the government for failures of the VA to do the job that should have been done. Under David Shulkin, the Secretary of the VA appointed by President Trump, under the leadership of our committees in the House and the Senate, and under a commitment to bipartisan service by all our Members—which means we do almost everything unanimously and, if not unanimously, almost unanimously because it is not about getting Republican credit or Democratic credit; it is about doing the right thing for the right people who have done so much for us—we passed the Whistleblower Protection Act this year to give whistleblowers in the VA the protection they need to go and turn in to the authorities those employees in the Veterans Administration who are not doing their job. We have given them the safe harbor they need to encourage them to help us root out problems, and we are doing that.

We passed the accountability bill to shine the light of sunshine on the employees of the VA and to give the authorities in the VA the ability to terminate and fire, if you will, for cause an employee who is not doing the job they should be doing for our veterans. So we hold a standard of accountability up a little higher for our employees in the Veterans Administration.

We are magnifying choice so that our veterans can have more choice in their healthcare. We can use the private sector as a force multiplier so that the government doesn't have to hire all the doctors and physicians and assistants to service the VA. We can get them in the private sector as well.

In the 21st century GI bill, we finally made sure that the GI bill applies to everyone, not just World War II or Vietnam war-era veterans but veterans of all conflicts and of all times.

We have done everything we can to see to it that the benefits, which we promised them would be there when they left the military, are there for them in retirement and in their later life. The sacrifices they make are great, and the sacrifices we have made to save our veterans are great.

Today veterans come home from the battlefield 90 percent of the time when they are wounded. They come home, whereas, in World War I, 10 percent came home, and 90 percent died on the battlefield. But because of the advancements we have made in armor and protection and healthcare services, a lot of veterans today live when they would not have lived just 25 or 30 years ago.

The injuries they sustain are far greater than any injuries we have known in warfare before. The signature illnesses are PTSD, post-traumatic stress syndrome, or traumatic brain injury or a prosthesis for an arm or a leg or an eye or some part of the body that is lost in battle. But the trunk of the

body is protected by new Kevlar vests that are impenetrable by a bullet, so most of them succumb to IEDs and explosives and things of that nature.

We have the healthcare to provide them with the best possible rehabilitation we can, but you can never really replace a leg or an eye or a body part. Once somebody has sacrificed it forever, they wear the burden of the battle and of war.

We have an obligation, as the Veterans Administration, as the Congress of the United States in the House and the Senate, to see to it that we back up those promises our recruiters made when they came to join the military, to see to it that they get those services from their Veterans Administration.

Dr. David Shulkin is doing a phenomenal job. My ranking member, JON TESTER, Democrat from Montana, is doing a fantastic job. The House committee is doing a great job. The Members of the Senate are doing a great job.

In a week and a half, we are going to have our final bill of the year which, when we pass it, will make us 8 for 8. We will have totally reformed the VA and worked with the VA to reform it in such a way that our veterans get better service, our taxpayers get more accountability for the dollars we spend, and America remains the great country it has always been—safe and free because of those who volunteer to fight and are willing to die on behalf of our country.

So sometime on the 11th day and, hopefully, at the 11th hour and the 11th minute of that hour on November 11, you will pause for a minute and remember I told you that is when we celebrate Veterans Day because, at the time the armistice was signed in World War I, our country decided that would be the perfect time to remember all those who have fought in the past.

Let's look around, and every time we see a man or woman in uniform, stop and say "Thank you for your service" because those are the people who are risking their lives so that you and I can do whatever it is we choose to do in this land of the free and home of the brave.

There are lots of things to be thankful for but nothing more important than the men and women of the U.S. military. May God bless our country, may God bless our veterans, may God bless the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak today on the floor of the Senate after my esteemed colleague from the State of Georgia. My colleague is the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I just want to express my appreciation for his commitment and his work on behalf of all of our great veterans.

Like him, I rise today to speak in tribute to our veterans and men and

women in uniform and all that they do for us.

This weekend at events across the country, we will pay tribute to the fine men and women who have served in our Nation's Armed Forces. Every day—but especially on Veterans Day—we honor these soldiers who have left the comforts of home and family to defend our freedoms and fight for our way of life.

Our freedoms have been secured by the sweat and sacrifice of courageous men and women who, throughout our history, have bravely done what was needed to protect our great Nation. We also recognize that those who serve do not serve alone. We appreciate, too, the sacrifices of the families and the loved ones who have supported our veterans in their service.

This Veterans Day, we will honor military members from our "greatest generation" to those men and women fighting in the War on Terror today. These Americans understand best the words of President Ronald Reagan when he said:

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.

These men and women who have fought for and protected our country have given so much, and we cannot do enough to thank them, whether they returned from Active military duty 7 days ago or seven decades ago.

Although we can never repay our debt of gratitude, one of the most tangible ways we recognize our veterans' service is by providing these men and women with quality healthcare and support services, including education and work opportunities. With that debt in mind, let me briefly outline some initiatives that we have been working on to provide for our veterans. Congress has passed significant veterans bills this year, including legislation that holds the VA accountable and ensures that VA employees are putting our veterans first and legislation that updates and modernizes the VA's benefit claims and appeals process, reducing wait times for our veterans.

Additionally, one of my top priorities is ensuring that our veterans have access to healthcare options closer to their homes and their families.

This includes improving veterans' access to services under the Veterans Choice Program and building on the success of the Veterans Care Coordination Initiative at the Fargo VA Medical Center in my home State. This effort has decreased the wait time for scheduling an appointment under Veterans Choice from 24 days a year ago to 5 or 6 days at present. This initiative can serve as a model to help address delays in scheduling appointments through the Veterans Choice Program across the Nation.

We invited Secretary Shulkin, from North Dakota, to see this firsthand, and our Veterans Care Coordination Initiative has since been expanded to

the VA facility in Helena, MT, as well. We believe it will be expanded to other locations across the country.

We also passed an extension of the Veterans Choice Program earlier this year and secured \$2.1 billion in additional funding for the program. This gives us time to work with the VA on the next phase of the program. In addition to Veterans Choice, we are working to improve local access to long-term care for our veterans.

We secured a commitment from Secretary Shulkin to work with us on the Veterans Access to Long Term Care and Health Services Act. We have now introduced this legislation in the Senate, and a companion bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives. The legislation would remove burdensome redtape that prevents nursing homes and other healthcare providers from accepting veteran patients. Our bill allows the VA to enter into provider agreements with qualified healthcare and extended care facilities, bypassing complex Federal contracting requirements. This will give veterans more options to access long-term care services closer to their homes, their families, and to their loved ones.

In addition, earlier this year, Congress passed—and the President signed into law—the forever GI bill, which improved and extended veterans' access to education and workforce opportunities. This is part of our efforts to ensure that we are supporting our veterans as they transition back to civilian life and work here at home. These are just a few examples of our efforts to ensure our veterans have the resources and the support they have so richly earned. While we cannot say thank you enough, in this way, we can honor their courage and their sacrifice.

We honor Veterans Day because we have the greatest veterans in the world who have committed themselves to protect our Nation, and in so doing, they have transformed this country into the greatest the world has ever known. May God continue to bless our veterans and this great Nation that they have been protecting and make sure we honor the selfless service of all our men and women in uniform, of all our veterans, not only on Veterans Day but every day.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I appreciate the kind words of Senator HOEVEN and his affinity toward veterans. I am here to talk about our veterans as well.

I come at it from three different perceptions. I chair the Military Personnel Subcommittee in the Senate Armed Services Committee. We are trying to work on things to make sure that when somebody goes out of Active Duty into veteran status, we make it as productive as it can be, making sure they enter back fully into the workforce, the education opportunities, and

all the kinds of opportunities that are afforded them as a result of serving in our armed services.

I also want to take a minute to talk about the person who served but never wore a uniform, and that is the husband or the wife or the children whom, on this Veterans Day, we should also thank.

A lot of times, when I have an opportunity—I live in Charlotte, NC, where we have nearly 800,000 veterans. It is one of the largest populations of any one State—I make a point to get to the airport a little bit early so I can go up to the USO and just spend a moment meeting with people who are there transitioning from Active Duty and veterans to thank them for their service. Oftentimes, I will thank a man or woman, and they will say: I didn't serve; my husband or my wife did. I will say: By virtue of your being a military spouse, you served, as did your children.

On this Veterans Day, let's make sure we expand those thank-yous to include everybody who is affected when somebody is deployed in a dangerous place or even serving in peacetime. It is a great sacrifice, and it is one we should always show our gratitude for.

As I said, in North Carolina, we have about 800,000 veterans. We also have one of the highest military concentrations of any State. It is the home of the Global Response Force at Fort Bragg, with over 65,000 men and women serving and 38 generals. You go down closer to the coast and you get to Jacksonville, NC, where we have Camp Lejeune. There is a debate over the pronunciation so I will pronounce it both ways, but there we have nearly 45 percent of the Marine Corps. Many people don't realize that. Stationed out of North Carolina, we could go to Seymour Johnson, we could go to New River, or go to Cherry Point and see these men and women serving every day—and the ones who served before them who are now part of our veteran population. We should thank them all for their current service or their past service.

I say to the Presiding Officer, the Senator from Arkansas, I want to thank you for your service because you served bravely in combat positions before entering the Senate. That is another amazing thing about the veterans. They continue to serve. If you go to a coffee shop, you may see a huddle of veterans around somebody who is organizing the event. That is probably a veteran making sure veterans are speaking with each other and working through some of the challenges some of them have when they are put in very difficult situations or, if you go into a community center, you will almost always see a veteran there continuing to serve, even after they ended their Active-Duty service.

On Veterans Day, we should make it a point to go to every person we know who is a veteran and thank them. We should make sure that everybody we

see in uniform—I will be at the airport probably Thursday evening or Friday. I will make it a point to go to every single person I see in uniform and thank them for their service. We owe that to them for all they do for us.

I think, on the one hand, we need to think about veterans, especially on Veterans Day, but as Senator HOEVEN said, we need to think about them every day. As a Senator, the way we do that is not just by thinking but by doing. What more can I do in my capacity on the Veterans' Affairs Committee or in my capacity on the Senate Armed Services Committee to make service easier and safer? After they move out of Active status to veteran status, what more can we do for them? There are a lot of things we can do; one is to make sure they get an opportunity to have a job that, in many cases, will leverage the skills they learned when they were in the military into private sector jobs.

Mr. President, you and I sponsored a bill—the VALOR Act—that will be brought up before the Senate that helps to actually expedite the process of having those who have served in the military to get hired. It makes it easier for employers to put them in apprenticeship positions, where maybe they leverage some of the skills they learned while on Active Duty but get them in good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families.

There are a number of other things we have to do for others who are veterans that I think are particularly important. When we talk about post-traumatic stress or talk about traumatic brain injury, those are, in some cases, invisible wounds of war. We need to make sure and understand why it is that nearly every day 20 veterans take their lives through suicide. To what extent could that be something we just simply didn't know about that veteran? Why are they disproportionately more likely to do it? Many of them, incidentally—the veterans today who have this disproportionately high amount of suicide incidents—are veterans from the Vietnam war. We need to figure out how to reach back to that population—a significant number of whom never seek VA medical services—to provide them with the resources they need to work through these sorts of challenges.

We need to make sure healthcare is available across the map. We need to recognize that challenge in North Carolina is vastly different than the same challenge in, say, South Dakota.

We have a State population of 10 million people—almost approaching 1 million veterans. When you include the spouses and families, it is well above it. We need to make sure they are getting healthcare and services where it is most convenient for them. I think some of that will be providing them with a choice to go to the doctor who makes the most sense for them. A lot of it will be providing a brick-and-mortar presence of the VA so they can be

among other people who are actually dealing with the same sorts of circumstances, and they are actually being served by—about half the population in our veterans hospitals and our healthcare centers are veterans themselves.

This is a very important part of the broader solution we need to provide to our veterans as we continue to build a relationship with them for the rest of their lives. We will never finish all the work we should do. We will keep on making installments into a debt we can never repay, but what we need to do on November 11 is support our veterans by showing our gratitude and our thanks for their service. On this Veterans Day, make an extra effort to thank a veteran. Thank a veteran spouse. Thank the child of a veteran for their service to this great Nation. We will never be able to fully repay the debt we owe them, but we can make a lot of installments as individual citizens and as Members of this Congress. As long as I am in the Senate, that is what I intend to do.

I say to the Presiding Officer, thank you, again, for your service, and thank you to all the men and women who served before.

I yield the floor.

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

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

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak as in morning business.

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

HEALTHCARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I appreciate all of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle who will be joining us here this afternoon and thank them for their leadership on our legislation and for taking the time to speak today.

We are now exactly 1 week into open enrollment, and it has been 3 weeks since Chairman ALEXANDER and I put forward a bipartisan bill to stabilize our healthcare markets and lower patients' healthcare costs. So I wanted to come this afternoon to talk for a few minutes about what it means that so many people nationwide are signing up for coverage and why there is no good reason for Republican leadership to wait another minute before bringing up our bill for a vote.

It is still early, but what we are seeing so far is that millions of people across our country are going to healthcare.gov to shop for coverage. Some 200,000 signed up on the first day. That is more than double the amount from last year. The vast majority will get tax credits to help cover their costs. In fact, some who are struggling the most will find they can save even

more this year because of how our current healthcare system absorbs cost increases.

But there is no question that premiums are going up in many places and that fewer coverage options are available and not every consumer is protected. One woman—Melissa—told the Washington Post this week that she is “joining the ranks of the uninsured” for the first time in her life as a 51-year-old. She said that she doesn’t qualify for subsidies and that given how much her premiums would increase, her insurance costs would have been more than her mortgage payments each month. Melissa is one of the people paying the price for President Trump’s healthcare sabotage and the Republican leadership’s—so far—willingness to cheer him along.

It is unacceptable that patients and families are having to take on this burden. Let’s remember that when someone goes to sign up for healthcare coverage, they are not doing it as a Republican or a Democrat, they are doing it as a parent or a caregiver or a business owner who wants to stay healthy and financially secure.

Here in Washington, DC, healthcare has become bogged down in politics, but in cities and towns across the country, it is about taking care of yourselves and your loved ones. That is why so many people are going online to shop for coverage despite the President’s insistence that healthcare in the United States was going to “implode,” regardless of the fact that to make implosion a reality, President Trump—among his many other efforts at sabotage—shortened the enrollment period this year and gutted investments in outreach and advertising and caused premiums for those people to increase by double digits on the average. Patients and families deserve so much better.

I have said it before: The frustrating thing is that all this could have been avoided. Way back in September, Chairman ALEXANDER and I were on the verge of an agreement to stabilize healthcare markets and lower premiums for the coming year and for 2019. Our agreement would have provided multiyear certainty on the out-of-pocket cost reduction subsidies that President Trump decided to stop paying even though the law says he is required to do so. Had we been able to move faster, our legislation would have resulted in lower premiums right away for 2018. But Republican leaders pressed the “pause” button on bipartisan negotiations so they could try one more time to jam partisan repeal through the Senate, and we lost a lot of precious time.

Our bill, the Lamar Alexander-Patty Murray Senate bill, would do a lot of good right now and over the next years. If Republican leadership takes up our legislation now and passes it, families would see rebates this year and lower healthcare costs next year because our bill is designed to ensure

that the benefit of greater certainty is passed on to patients and taxpayers, not hoarded by insurance companies.

Our deal would also invest in open enrollment and outreach for 2019, so more people would be covered. It would allow States more flexibility to innovate as the Affordable Care Act always intended. It would mark a critical step away from this harmful partisanship on healthcare and toward working under regular order on solutions that make healthcare work better for the people we serve.

Finally, this legislation would send a critical message to patients and families that when Congress sets aside partisan difference and focuses on what is best for our country, we can deliver a result, as Chairman ALEXANDER often says.

More than 200 groups representing doctors, hospitals, State officials, Governors, and patients have endorsed our bill. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says it would do exactly what it was intended to do—stabilize markets and bring down healthcare costs—while returning \$3.8 billion to taxpayers.

Twelve Senate Democrats and 12 Senate Republicans cosponsored it. We are continuing to build support, and there is no question that it would pass here with a filibuster-proof majority if it were brought to the floor. And while the Senate shouldn’t need President Trump’s signoff to take a position on ways to fix the Nation’s healthcare system, the President has supported this process moving forward.

So here we are, and right now it is up to Republican leaders. They can choose to stay in a partisan corner and reject an opportunity to lower patients’ healthcare costs in a bipartisan way, or they can do what people across the country want them to do and put patients over politics.

I do want to note that if Republican leaders hadn’t gotten the message, voters made it pretty clear last night that they reject the deeply harmful partisanship we have seen on healthcare.

It is well past time for Republican leaders to give up the ghost on TrumpCare, declare it dead, and work with Democrats to get real solutions. That starts with our bipartisan bill to lower healthcare costs and stabilize the markets, because if they don’t, they can be sure they will be held accountable.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleague from Washington, Senator MURRAY, and congratulate her and Senator ALEXANDER on being able to reach agreement to move forward to address the uncertainty in the marketplace.

Like Senator MURRAY, I also want to begin with what we are seeing going on in this open enrollment period. Despite all of the efforts to undermine the Affordable Care Act, to shorten the time