

speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Utah.

TAX REFORM

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I have listened to the minority leader's remarks. If anybody believes that we are going to be able to work together closely when they just want a bill for the Federal Government at all costs—they had us right there on the cusp of socialism just a month ago, and we are still right on the cusp of socialism. I hate to say it, but our Democratic friends are pushing us toward socialism, which has never worked anywhere in the world, and it is not going to work here. Their answer to everything is big government.

There are two different points of view here. I have to tell you I used to be on their side when I was a young fellow. I was raised in poverty. I came up the hard way. I learned a trade. I became a journeyman metal lather, which was one of the most skilled trades at the time.

I have to say that these haunting re-frains were used by Democrats back then, too, but look at this country and the mess it is in, and it is in a mess because of their philosophy. We have to change it. I admit, with him, that the business community isn't always right, and they are not always the best to spend our money, but they are sure a lot better than government spending it all the time. So much for that.

The Senate will soon vote on a motion to proceed to legislation to reform our Nation's broken Tax Code and to provide significant relief for tens of millions of middle-class families.

Members from both parties have worked for years on this effort. As we move to consider this legislation, we will take another step toward accomplishing what has—until recently, anyway—been a bipartisan goal. I want to thank all of those who have helped us advance this process, especially the members and staff of the Finance Committee, who have worked tirelessly to get us to this point. I also want to thank our distinguished majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, for his work and leadership on this as well.

Of course, we are not there yet. We have a number of additional steps to take, including today's vote. I don't want to put any carts ahead of any horses, but I am optimistic that we can get a positive outcome today.

Our tax reform bill is crafted with the primary purpose of providing tax relief to the middle class and growth to our economy. To accomplish these goals, the bill lowers individual tax rates across the board. The bill also expands the zero tax bracket by nearly doubling the standard deduction, doubling the child tax credit, and increasing the child tax credit refundability, all of which, combined, will eliminate income tax liability for many hard-working American families and signifi-

cantly cut taxes for tens of millions of middle-class taxpayers. That sounds like the right thing to do to me.

Some examples, I think, can be illustrative here. Under our bill, a family of four making the U.S. median family income of around \$73,000 a year will see their taxes go down by more than \$2,000 a year. That is a savings of more than \$180 a month. Overall, this represents a nearly 60-percent reduction in that family's tax liability. A single parent with one child making \$41,000 a year, under the bill, will pay about one-quarter of the Federal income taxes he or she may pay today, an annual reduction of almost \$1,400. Now, that is real money for these families. It will help them to make car payments, to pay their rent or mortgages, to bring down credit card balances, or to increase their ability to save for the future.

In addition to reducing the tax burden on low-income to middle-income families, the changes in our bill will make filing taxes much simpler for most of these taxpayers. According to JCT, or the Joint Committee on Taxation, more than 9 in 10 American families will opt for the standard deduction under this legislation, avoiding altogether the difficult and complicated process of itemizing deductions. This means less time and money spent on tax compliance and preparation for millions of middle-class taxpayers. It may hurt the legal profession, but it is going to give freedom to the American people.

The bill also repeals one of the most regressive taxes in American history—the ObamaCare individual mandate tax, which overwhelmingly burdens middle-income and low-income families. In fact, 80 percent of the families that pay the tax make less than \$50,000 per year. Yet this repeal has been the source of much consternation for my friends on the other side of the aisle. I will have more to say on that in a moment.

For most small businesses that pay taxes on the owners' individual returns, or passthroughs, the bill provides significant relief in the form of a simple tax reduction applied to qualified business income. This will reduce the overall tax burden for passthrough businesses, which are the primary engines of our job creation in the United States. In addition, our bill helps Main Street businesses by enhancing expensing and expanding the availability of simplified cash accountability. All told, this means more expansion, more investment, and more jobs for U.S. workers employed by small businesses.

Make no mistake, this bill is pro-small business, which is why the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the largest small business association in the country, has enthusiastically expressed its support for our legislation. They are not stupid. They are brilliant people. They know how badly the small business community has been treated by our tax writers over the years, and they are looking forward to this legislation passing.

It should probably go without saying at this point that the United States currently has the highest corporate tax rate in the industrialized world, and, as a result, we are seeing businesses flee our country for more favorable tax conditions overseas, while others are getting purchased by foreign companies. Some of them are just giving up and letting foreign companies take them over. That is not good for American workers, and that is not good for America.

Former Presidents Clinton and Obama have spoken in favor of lowering the corporate tax rate to allow our country to be more globally competitive. That sentiment has been shared by countless Democrats in this Chamber, including the current ranking member on the Finance Committee and the Senate Minority Leader. With this bill, we are taking their advice by lowering the corporate tax rate to 20 percent.

We also shift to a more territorial system of international tax—another idea that was explicitly endorsed in a bipartisan working group report, coauthored by my good friend Senator SCHUMER, by the way, who just spoke here. This shift is paid for largely through the use of a “deemed repatriation,” another idea supported by Democrats in recent years. We are creating both incentives and penalties to prevent base erosion, a goal that has become clearly bipartisan during the recent waves of corporate inversions.

Long story short, there is quite a bit in this bill that both Republicans and Democrats should be able to support. Of course, anyone who gets their information solely from the statements and talking points from our friends on the other side would never get that.

Over the next few days, I expect we will hear quite a few misleading claims, both about the bill and about the process which led us here. For example, I think we will hear that this bill is just a massive giveaway to the so-called rich. That is always the claim of the Democrats: It is a gift to the so-called rich. Gosh, give me a break. I get so tired of that phony, lousy argument that they make all the time. They have hurt the middle class so badly in this country; it is unbelievable.

My colleagues will make the claim that this is a massive giveaway to the so-called rich even though they have the same data from the Joint Committee on Taxation, which clearly shows that middle-class taxpayers will receive the largest proportional tax cuts under the bill and that none of the existing tax burden will be shifted downward from those at the top. In fact, those in the highest bracket, according to JCT, or the Joint Committee on Taxation, will pay a higher percentage of the overall tax burden than they do now.

I expect we will hear that, by repealing the individual mandate tax, the bill will be taking people's health insurance away and raising taxes on the

poor. That claim will be made despite confirmation from congressional scorekeepers that nothing—nothing—in the bill removes or limits anyone's access to health insurance. The approach they are taking toward health insurance will put us into a socialized medicine situation overnight. If anybody thinks that is a great idea, I ask them to look at the socialized medicine countries and compare them to what we have been able to have. Instead, JCT and CBO predict that, with no individual mandate, people will choose to not get health insurance even if they still have access to premium subsidies, employer-provided plans, or even free health coverage through Medicaid. This bill provides choice. It doesn't take anything away from those individuals.

We can quibble with that conclusion and question whether tens of millions of people who currently have health insurance—including a few million who are currently getting it for free—will suddenly opt to go uninsured once the mandate penalty is zeroed out. Given that most observers have concluded that the mandate has essentially failed to draw enough participants into the healthcare market to keep premiums from skyrocketing, there is room for questioning whether the scorekeepers are right on that score. However, even if they are 100 percent correct, no one will lose their health insurance under this bill when the mandate is repealed. Anyone going uninsured will be doing so voluntarily. We are not kicking anyone off their insurance by zeroing out the individual mandate penalty, and it is a blatant distortion of reality to claim otherwise.

Similarly, no one's taxes will go up if the mandate is zeroed out. True enough, our scorekeepers have produced distribution tables showing an uptick in taxes at the low end of the income spectrum due to decreased utilization of premium tax credits under ObamaCare. My colleagues, I am sure, will talk about this at length as well. However, I would like to have one of them explain how a person's voluntary decision to forego a tax subsidy amounts to a tax hike. So far, I haven't heard a serious attempt at such an explanation. In fact, during our recent markup, when the chief of staff of JCT sat at a table and told my colleagues that no one will owe a dime in additional taxes as a result of the individual mandate repeal, none of my colleagues disputed this conclusion. Instead, they opted to ignore it, even after they were shown a JCT table showing that, if the behavioral effects of the mandate repeal are removed from the equation—as they should be when we are talking about taxes owed—every income group will see their taxes go down under this bill. I hope our colleagues and those watching will remember these facts when they are evaluating the claims being made by some on the other side.

We have a good bill here, under the circumstances, and I believe Members

of both parties, if politics were removed from consideration, could support it. We have gotten significant support throughout the business community, with associations and companies from almost every industry and sector publicly in support of the reforms in this bill.

I know some of my Republican colleagues have concerns, and I have been committed to working with them to see if improvements can be made, and, as this process moves forward, we are going to have to make a few more changes. This, of course, is how the legislative process works. Our process is designed to produce legislation that reflects the combined views and interests of a majority of Senators and, more importantly, the constituents they represent.

As with any legislative endeavor of real significance, the perfect should not be considered the enemy of the good. As I have said before, I have been around long enough to know that anyone demanding perfection when it comes to major legislation is bound to be waiting a very, very long time and likely will not accomplish much.

Before I close, I want to underscore how much of a once-in-a-generation opportunity this is. We need to get this done. The costs of failure and continuing with the status quo are just too high. The American people deserve a tax system that provides greater opportunity, a stronger economy, and better jobs. We need a tax code designed to work for the world of 2017 and beyond. Our bill will accomplish these goals. We need to take this next step so that we can continue the work. So I urge all of my colleagues to vote yes on the motion to proceed.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, two weeks ago, I urged my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to reject the partisan and fiscally irresponsible Republican tax proposal in the so-called Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. I asked them to remember that, when it comes to our responsibility to plan for the nation's long-term economic future, we are here to create opportunity and security for future generations—not to serve the short-term interests of partisan politics. Today, I regret to say that the process surrounding the Republican tax bill has only become more rushed, more partisan, more bitter, and less transparent. My Republican colleagues wrote this bill behind closed doors, held no serious hearings or debate, and even now are planning to make substantial changes to the final bill that we will vote on before we have even had the benefit of a comprehensive, nonpartisan score of its cost.

We all know better than to believe that this irresponsible process will lead to a responsible or sustainable outcome. Therefore, because it is clear that this bill is an unprecedented giveaway to wealthy corporations and indi-

viduals at the expense of poor, sick, elderly, and middle-class Americans, and because it will drive our Nation trillions of dollars further into debt, I strongly urge my colleagues to reject this bill and to work with both sides of the aisle to craft tax reform that will help—rather than burden—future generations and the middle class.

The only future generations that this bill appears to take into account are the children and grandchildren of the wealthiest families in the United States, including President Trump's family and the families of the wealthiest Cabinet ever assembled by any President. According to the non-partisan Tax Policy Center, half of all households, and two-thirds of households making between \$54,700 and \$93,200 would see their taxes go up under the current Republican bill. Individuals who struggle to get by because of sickness or the unavailability of well-paying job opportunities would lose tax exemptions and advantages that have helped them stay afloat. Many Americans who have played by the rules and persevered through our long recovery from the great recession will open their paychecks to see a little more taken out every month, but not for their benefit. On the other hand, for the 5,000 American families with fortunes in the millions of dollars or more, the Republican plan to repeal or drastically curtail the estate tax could, on its own, funnel hundreds of billions of dollars to those few who need it the very least.

The mere idea that we would raise taxes on poor and working Americans to pay for tax cuts for the wealthiest American estates epitomizes how this Republican tax bill is wholly at odds with our values. The trillions of dollars this bill will add to our deficit will almost certainly lead to deep cuts in earned benefits like Social Security and Medicare, as well as our national defense. Indeed, major cuts to defense historically follow deficit-increasing tax cuts, and this is almost precisely why we have an estate tax in the first place.

Our Nation first enacted estate taxes in order to pay for military conflicts without driving the Nation deeply into debt. Starting in 1797, and continuing through the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I, the United States used temporary estate taxes to offset the costs of war. Congress kept the estate tax after World War I as a means of balancing the Federal budget and countering the growth of massive wealth inequality. Because of this foresight, the estate tax was a critical source of revenue that softened the blow of the Great Depression and supported the war effort in World War II.

Prior Congresses saw it as their responsibility to pay America's bills at home and abroad. They did not leave years of war on America's line of credit, nor did they expect the poor and working classes to pay while the

wealthiest took a tax cut. There were certainly times when running a deficit was necessary, and even economically wise, but because of this pay-as-you-go principle, no American generation has faced what we do now: 16 years of deficit-financed military conflict with no end in sight, compounded by the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy that never paid for themselves, despite repeated Republican promises. Before we give the wealthiest Americans another tax cut at the expense of our children and our children's children, we need at least an idea of how we are going to handle trillions of dollars in compounding war debt—not to mention the trillions more we must spend to maintain and modernize our military—and address our basic domestic needs that have gone unnoticed and underfunded for so long.

That is why I plan to file a motion on this bill that would send this bill back to the Finance Committee to reinstate the estate tax at current levels and place all the revenue generated by it into a trust fund. Those funds, which amount to hundreds of billions of dollars over a decade, will be devoted evenly between maintaining the readiness of our Armed Forces and addressing the opioid epidemic here at home. This motion not only restores original intent of the estate tax as a tool for combating deficits in times of war but also makes a much needed down-payment on our long-stalled domestic agenda.

But the bill's elimination of the estate tax is just one of its many harmful provisions. The bill sabotages our healthcare system by repealing the individual mandate, which could easily throw 13 million Americans off their health insurance and increase premiums for millions of others. Yet again, the 130 million Americans with preexisting conditions must fear that their premiums will skyrocket or that they will be left with no options at all.

And the poor and the sick may find even fewer options after this bill forces \$25 billion in cuts into Medicare in 2018 alone because of the massive deficits it will produce. Do not tell me this will pay for itself with growth. I have served in this body long enough to know that trickle-down economics doesn't work, and I take the word of the scores of economists who say, in no uncertain terms, that this bill will balloon the debt and will not create enough growth to offset it. Even major companies like Cisco, Pfizer, and Coca-Cola say they will use the gains from these massive corporate tax cuts to pay shareholders, rather than create jobs or raise wages for the middle class. We are making decisions here that will guide the largest economy in the world. We simply cannot roll the dice on a plan of this scale and hope for the best.

It remains my sincere hope that my Republican colleagues will see the error of their ways and choose to work with Democrats on tax reform that is

bipartisan, reasonable, and in keeping with our responsibility to leave this Nation better than we found it. We can and should address other domestic priorities in dire need like our Nation's infrastructure, the economic security of children and seniors, and programs that create and sustain employment for the middle class. I and my colleagues are ready and willing to work in good faith on tax reform, but we cannot begin that work until we abandon the kind of recklessness and partisanship that led to this Republican tax bill.

Once again, we are all here, and we are all committed to defending our Nation, but this bill will make it virtually impossible to do what we know we must do. There are unavoidable costs in our national security that are not even counted in this bill. My fellow members of the Armed Services Committee and I have committed to making needed increases to the size of our military forces. It costs roughly an additional \$1.8 billion per year for every 10,000 servicemembers. Where will we get that money when we are going \$1.8 trillion in debt to provide tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans? We want a 355-ship Navy. There have been some estimates that doing that will require at least an additional \$1 trillion a year. Where are we going to get that when we have already given \$1.5 trillion to the wealthiest Americans? We have to modernize our nuclear triad, our submarines, our land-based missiles, and our aircraft. There are estimates that this will cost about \$400 billion per year in costs. Where are we getting that, since we have given the money—\$1.5 trillion—to the wealthiest Americans? We have overseas operations in Iraq. Over a 10-year period, roughly \$10 billion must be repaid. We pay about \$1 billion a year there. For Syria, that is \$13 billion. If we stay there for 10 years—and that seems to be the present policy—that is \$130 billion. We pay \$50 billion a year to support the Afghan operation. We are going to stay there, apparently, under the current procedure—not based on time but conditions—for another 10 years. Add that up, and that is about \$640 billion over the next 10 years, just to maintain the situation in those three countries.

These are not costs we can ignore. If we did, we would—at the very least—be turning our backs on the policies announced by this President and this Congress—and by my Republican colleagues in particular. But where is this money coming from? We don't have the situation we had in 2001 when President George W. Bush proposed his tax cuts. We don't have an expected \$5 trillion surplus. We already have a multi-trillion-dollar deficit over 10 years, and we are adding to that deficit. We know we have to maintain the military expenditures.

Anyone who is voting for this bill is essentially saying: I will talk a good story about supporting national security, but when it comes down to the

money, it is going to go to the wealthiest Americans, to things like the estate tax cut. It is going to go to the wealthiest Americans who are paying the alternative minimum tax. The money we need for security will not be there unless we borrow it from future generations—to fund the things we know we already have to fund to defend America.

This is absolutely irresponsible, and, as a result, I would hope we could regain our senses, sit down, and deal, on a bipartisan basis, with tax reform that could help all of us and could indeed even begin, after 16 years, to put real money into our national defense rather than borrowing it from future generations. Again, this bill is not only economically unwise because it will not generate growth, but it is also irresponsible because it will put us in a position where we will be choosing, very shortly—in the next several years—whether we are going to cut defense or whether we are going to cut Social Security or whether we are going to cut everything because the deficit is growing so large. I don't think we should put ourselves in that position.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, the American people have gotten a lot of lip service over the past 10 months. Remember draining the swamp and fighting for the forgotten families? The President apparently forgot them when he filled the Cabinet with a who's who of Wall Street. How about every single American having better, cheaper healthcare? That was, of course, before Republicans tried to kick millions of people off of their coverage, increase costs for millions more, and gut protections for people with preexisting conditions.

You would think it would be tough to top all of that, but here we are watching as Republicans, led by President Trump, twist themselves into knots trying to convince hard-working families that the GOP tax plan is anything but a high-priced giveaway to millionaires, billionaires, and the biggest corporations. It is a high-priced giveaway paid for by—you guessed it—the middle class and those who can least afford it. This is so wrong, and I am glad, finally, the phones across the Capitol are today lighting up with constituents demanding to know how anyone promising to represent them could possibly put their name on this terrible, partisan, fast-tracked bill because they see the same nonpartisan reports we all do. They know expert after expert has confirmed what we all know: The Republican tax plan will hurt millions of everyday Americans, including those who are already falling behind in an economy that tilts further and further in favor of the wealthiest few. They know the Republican tax plan takes money out of their pockets. They know it guts their healthcare by spiking premiums and leaving millions and millions of

Americans without the coverage they need. They know it papers over our Nation's paid family leave problem, instead giving corporations a massive giveaway and leaving families who need to care for loved ones in the lurch. They know it adds trillions of dollars to the national debt, setting up, once again, the perfect foil for Republicans to then come after Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and other middle-class priorities when the bill comes due.

In case that wasn't enough, the Senate Republican tax bill adds a backdoor attempt to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling for oil, just for good measure. Republicans are even trying to pay for tax cuts for those at the top by sabotaging families' healthcare in this bill in a way that would spike premiums, cause 13 million people to lose their coverage, and create more chaos in the healthcare system.

I know they are claiming the bipartisan bill I reached with Chairman ALEXANDER can somehow fix this if it is signed into law and that other bipartisan legislation to help States cover the costs of enrolling very sick patients might help, too, but let me make very clear, that is very wrong. This is the classic example of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole and would be cold comfort to the people across the country who will struggle even more to get the care they need while at the same time watching massive corporations get more tax breaks they don't need.

If anyone was still under any illusion that Republicans were concerned about the middle class or fiscal responsibility or even regular order, that ends here and now. This is shameful and wrong. I have to say, it is not too late. I say this to my Republican colleagues, let's move right now to the bipartisan work we know our constituents actually want and expect. Let's return to a process that allows a true debate about our values and priorities as a nation. Let's talk about ways to help our workers and grow the economy from the middle out, such as access to high-quality childcare and pre-K for all of our working families; providing meaningful paid family and medical leave for every American; making college more affordable; investing in retirement security for our workers; supporting our veterans; and making healthcare higher quality, more affordable, and more accessible. Those are the kinds of conversations we should be having. Those are the people we should be investing in. We will not stop reminding you of that every day until you give up this cruel tax plan.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, President Trump and the Republican leadership are on television every day telling the American people how this tax bill is going to help the middle class, how it was written for the middle

class. Unfortunately, I will not shock too many people by suggesting what President Trump is saying is not truthful.

This legislation, according to independent studies, will provide 60 percent of the benefits to the top 1 percent. We are living in a moment in American history where we have massive levels of income and wealth inequality, where the top one-tenth of 1 percent now owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent, where three people—three of the wealthiest people in this country own more wealth than the bottom half of the American population. Yet my Republican colleagues believe this is a moment when 60 percent of the benefits of the so-called tax reform bill should go to the 1 percent. Meanwhile, millions of middle-class families will end up paying more in taxes. So we have a situation in which the wealthy, who need tax breaks the least, will benefit the most, and many millions of struggling working-class and middle-class families will end up paying more in taxes at the end of 10 years.

The President of the United States and my Republican colleagues tell the American people that trickle-down economics—giving huge tax breaks to the wealthy and large corporations—will expand the economy, will create new jobs, and will pay for the deficit that this legislation brings about. The simple truth is, trickle-down economics is a fraudulent theory. It has failed miserably in Kansas, where it has been most recently put into effect. It failed under the Reagan administration, and it failed under the administration of George W. Bush.

What interests me the most is, my Republican colleagues will not tell the American people how they are going to be paying for the \$1.4 trillion increase in deficits that this bill creates. You have a \$1.4 trillion increase in deficits. How is that going to be paid for? My view is that, without doubt, as soon as this legislation is passed, the Republicans will come back, and they will suddenly rediscover their religion about deficits. They will go before the American people and say we need "entitlement reform" or we need "welfare reform." Let me translate for you what "entitlement reform" means. It means that when millions of older workers have nothing in the bank saved up for retirement, they are going to propose massive cuts to Social Security.

We do not know exactly the form it will take. Maybe they will want to raise the retirement age, forcing older workers to work more before they can get their Social Security benefits. Maybe they will cut back on cost-of-living increases through a so-called chained CPI, which means lower benefits. They are going to go after Medicare. Maybe their idea will be to privatize Medicare, convert it into a voucher program, and say to older Americans: Here is a check for \$8,000. You go out and find the private insur-

ance that you can, and good luck to you with your \$8,000 check if you are dealing with heart disease or cancer. They will, no doubt, come back to slash Medicaid.

Now, these are not just wild ideas that I have been thinking about. This is pretty much what was in the budget the Republicans voted for right on the floor of the Senate. They already voted for a \$1 trillion cut over a 10-year period to Medicaid, and that means massive reductions in help not only for lower income Americans, not only for children but for people in nursing homes. They have already voted in the budget, over a 10-year period, to cut Medicare by \$470 billion, and in the House they are working hard to figure out ways to cut Social Security. The Republicans will also make massive cuts to education, to nutrition, and to environmental protection.

The other day, I sent a letter to the Senate majority leader, MITCH MCCONNELL, and to the Speaker of the House, PAUL RYAN. What I asked of them was to be honest with the American people.

I ask unanimous consent that the letter be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET,
Washington, DC, November 27, 2017.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,
Senate Majority Leader,
Washington, DC.

Hon. PAUL RYAN,
Speaker of the House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MAJORITY LEADER MCCONNELL AND SPEAKER RYAN: It is no secret that I am vigorously opposed to the disastrous "tax reform" bills that you are pushing in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate.

At a time of massive income and wealth inequality, both of these bills would provide huge tax breaks to the very rich and large corporations. Meanwhile, they would raise taxes for millions of middle class families.

Further, and the point of this letter, is that both of these bills would increase the federal deficit by more than \$1.4 trillion, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation.

I am very concerned that if you succeed in passing tax legislation that significantly adds to our national debt, you will then move aggressively to balance the budget on the backs of working families, the elderly, the children, the sick, and the poor. In other words, in order to pay for tax breaks for the rich and large corporations, you will make massive cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, nutrition, environmental protection, and every other program designed to protect the needs of the middle class and working families of our country.

Before the Senate votes on tax legislation that adds over \$1.4 trillion to the deficit, you owe the American people a specific and detailed explanation as to how the Republican Congress will achieve its commitment of balancing the budget over the next decade.

Will you schedule a vote to raise the eligibility of Medicare from 65 to 67 as called for in the House Budget Resolution? Will you attempt to end Medicare as we know it by giving seniors vouchers to purchase private health insurance, something long supported by Speaker Ryan?

How much will you cut Social Security? Will you try to increase the retirement age

to 70, cut cost-of-living adjustments for senior citizens and disabled veterans, and/or privatize Social Security?

Will you support legislation to cut Medicaid by \$1 trillion over the next decade, kicking 15 million Americans off of health insurance? As you know, this was a provision included in the Republican Budget Resolution that was passed earlier this year.

How much do you plan on cutting affordable housing, Pell Grants, WIC, and Head Start to pay for a permanent tax break for profitable corporations?

The bottom line is that the American people have a right to know exactly how you plan to pay for a \$1.4 trillion increase in the deficit before, not after, tax legislation is signed into law. In your response, please be as specific as you can.

Sincerely,

BERNARD SANDERS,
Ranking Member.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, this is what I asked:

I am very concerned that if you succeed in passing tax legislation that significantly adds to our national debt, you will then move aggressively to balance the budget on the backs of working families, the elderly, the children, the sick, and the poor. In other words, in order to pay for tax breaks for the rich and large corporations, you will make massive cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, nutrition, environmental protection, and every other program designed to protect the needs of the middle class and working families of our country.

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How much do you plan on cutting affordable housing, Pell Grants, WIC, and Head Start to pay for a permanent tax break for profitable corporations?

That is what I wrote to the majority leader.

My challenge right now to my Republican colleagues is—and I ask you—to come down to the floor of the Senate and tell me I am wrong. Come down here and tell the American people, if this legislation—this disastrous tax bill—passes, that you will not be coming back to cut Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, nutrition, education, and other programs. Maybe I am wrong. If Republicans come down here and say: Bernie, you are wrong. We have no intention of cutting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, I will come here, and I will apologize.

So here is my challenge right now to my Republican colleagues: Come down

here. Tell me and tell the American people I am wrong. Tell us all that you are not going to cut Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and education in order to deal with the \$1.4 trillion deficit you will bring about in this disastrous tax bill. Tell the American people you are not going to cut programs that the elderly, the children, the sick, and the poor desperately need in order to give huge tax breaks to the wealthy and large corporations.

That is my challenge, and I will be listening eagerly to see if there are any Republicans who are going to come down and tell me what I am suggesting is wrong.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, this week, we are debating the Republican tax relief plan.

I had a telephone townhall meeting the other night, along with Senator ENZI, and we talked to the people of Wyoming who have actually done the math and looked at the impact of the things that are included in this proposal—doubling the standard deduction and the child tax credit. People think it is a good deal for them personally, so there is a lot to like in this legislation. It gives tax cuts to hard-working American families; it makes taxes simpler and fairer; it makes American businesses more competitive around the world; and it makes our economy stronger here at home. That is all good news for our country and for the American people.

Now, there is other good news in this legislation, and it is something I continue to hear about at home and heard about over the Thanksgiving recess in Wyoming, which is that it wipes out the ObamaCare insurance mandate tax. This is the tax penalty the Obama healthcare law forced on the American people. Under the Republican plan, people would no longer have to pay a tax penalty to the IRS if they did not want the Democrats' expensive health insurance or if they just couldn't afford it.

We have seen health insurance premiums skyrocket over the past few years in this country, and it is because of the way Democrats wrote the healthcare law. The cost and the deductibles are so high that many people find that even if they have paid for the expensive insurance, they still can't afford to get the care they need. The law says that no matter how expensive the insurance gets or how unusable it is for that individual, by law, people still have to buy it or pay a tax.

Families ought to be able to make decisions about what they want to buy and what works for them, not the government. I believe that if people don't want to buy the ObamaCare insurance, they shouldn't have to pay a tax penalty to the IRS. Those are the things we are looking at.

Interestingly, today in the New York Times, there was more than half a page devoted to this. "Millions Pay Penalty

Instead of Buying Policy. Who Are They?" Well, in the State of Wyoming, over 15,000 people paid over \$5 million in fines to the IRS. This article today says that 6.7 million tax filers paid the penalty in 2015. Who are they? Well, it is not surprising to the Presiding Officer that the great majority of these—8 out of 10 who paid the fine—have an adjusted family income of less than \$50,000. It says the \$25,000 to \$50,000 income range group had the highest share of people paying the penalty in 2015. Why do we think those people aren't able to buy the insurance? It is too expensive. It is not a good deal for them. That is why even the New York Times is reporting that the \$25,000 to \$50,000 income group—hard-working American families—has the highest share of people paying the penalty.

Then they questioned why they paid the penalty, and it was because they couldn't afford the insurance. It is right here in black and white. It points out that the average penalty in 2017 is \$708. That is money those families could use for many other things, but it is not enough compared to the cost of the insurance, which is even higher. A single woman would have to pay a tax of either \$695 or 2.5 percent of her income, whichever is higher. That is the rule. The average is over \$700. For a couple, the tax would be double. A family with kids would pay additional for each of the children. The majority of Americans say they don't have enough savings to cover a \$500 emergency expense if one came up.

Who actually pays? These 16,000 people in Wyoming who paid the penalty are hard-working men and women who are opposed to the fact that Washington—the Federal Government under ObamaCare—says they have to pay a tax if they don't buy a government product that doesn't work for them.

Across the country, over 6 million people were hit with this extra tax. The ObamaCare insurance mandate tax is a direct tax on the working people of this country. I think it is not right. The Republican Party Members of the Senate think it is not right. Washington should not make people pay higher taxes just because they can't afford expensive ObamaCare insurance. People shouldn't be forced to buy a product that is not the right choice for them and their families.

The Congressional Budget Office says that if we get rid of the insurance mandate, 13 million people will eventually decide under their own free will not to have insurance. These people don't view it as a good benefit for them. That is why they may walk away from it. They don't view it as worth their money. Republicans want to give all these people a tax cut. Democrats want to make sure that people still have to pay the tax penalty.

There is a lot that I want to change about how America's healthcare system works. I want to repeal the entire healthcare law that the Democrats wrote a few years ago. I want to return

the money and the decisions back to the people or do that at the State level, where people at the local level can make the best decisions about what works best for them and their State, not a one-size-fits-all coming out of Washington. I haven't given up on trying to get that done because we need to make healthcare better in this country.

In Wyoming, we are down to just one insurer willing to sell these policies. That is happening more and more around the country. One insurer is not a marketplace but a monopoly. That has left many people at the breaking point.

I got an email from one man in Sheridan, WY. He talked about the fact that his monthly premiums will be going up by more than \$700 each month next year. That is for two adults, no children, and there is a deductible of \$6,000. He and his wife are stuck in a position where they will have to pay more than \$2,400 a month for insurance or pay an extra tax.

A woman from Park County wrote to me that her family had to switch insurance plans a couple of years ago. The coverage they had before was canceled.

Why did 5,000 people in Wyoming lose their insurance? Why was it canceled? It was good enough for them, provided what they needed, but the government said it wasn't good enough for the government. That is wrong.

This lady writes about the incredible increase in the costs. She asked, "What are we supposed to do?"

I have heard that in all corners of the State of Wyoming. What are they supposed to do? I don't believe these people should face a choice between paying sky-high insurance premiums or a sky-high tax penalty to the IRS. People in Wyoming and around the country want to buy insurance that is affordable, that works for them, and that fits their families' needs. They don't want to be forced to buy the insurance that Washington tells them they have to buy because Washington, as we have seen in the past, thinks they know better than the American people. People want the coverage they need so they can go to the doctor they want at lower costs.

I would also point out that the cost of insurance isn't the only problem we are looking at right now. There are other parts of the healthcare law that may actually be harming patients.

As a physician, I receive multiple medical journals. There was a new study out in the American Medical Association cardiology journal that looked at Medicare patients who were hospitalized with heart failure.

Many people across the country are hospitalized for heart failure. It is a chronic condition, and occasionally they have to go back in the hospital for additional treatment.

There is a program in the healthcare law that started to penalize hospitals if that Medicare patient was readmitted to the hospital within 30 days after

they had been released from the hospital. There are a number of reasons that that may happen, but the goal was to penalize hospitals, and—the goal, the laudable goal, was to give patients better treatment, but that is not what happened. This is the problem: The Democrats wrote into this law and the regulations something that they really had no evidence would actually help patients and save money at the same time. They said: We are going to penalize hospitals. So if every hospital improved its numbers, they were still going to grade it on a curve, so if a hospital didn't improve enough, it was still going to be penalized. That has had huge a impact on hospitals that take sicker patients, regardless of their location, in terms of how they do followup with patients.

Well, it turns out that the study in the Journal of the American Medical Association—a well-respected cardiology journal, their heart issue—says that the death rate actually went up after hospitals faced this new requirement. The study covered over 400 hospitals and over 110,000 patients. The study found that an extra 5,400 people are dying every year just among heart failure patients because of the way the Federal Government has chosen to penalize hospitals around the country when patients are readmitted. It is interesting because what has happened is that the readmission rates in the hospital have actually gone down. The hospitals succeeded in keeping people out to avoid the penalty, but people died in the process.

The Wall Street Journal had an editorial about it last week. They concluded that if you were doing a drug trial on a drug that you were working on inventing to improve the lives of people and you had the same results as this—5,000 people dying—they would have shut it down long ago. That is a deadly, unintended consequence of the ObamaCare healthcare law.

The insurance mandate was supposed to keep premiums from rising. Premiums have gone way up anyway. That is another unintended consequence of the law. In spite of good intentions, that is not what happened under the law that was passed and is the law of the land right now.

I believe we should repeal the entire law. Until we can do that, we should do what we can to help the American people who are struggling to deal with this expensive insurance and what I believe to be an unfair tax and fine that they must pay if they don't buy the insurance because they can't afford it, because it is not a good deal for them and it doesn't work for them or their families. It is not just unpopular, it is un-American. It took away people's choices. It forced them to buy expensive insurance that wasn't right for them.

It is time for the insurance mandate to go away. We know it is a bad idea. We need to give people relief from this terrible tax. The people of Wyoming

and the people of this country simply can't afford to wait any longer. It is time to repeal the mandate of the healthcare law.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BARASSO). The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Thank you, Mr. President. I thank the Presiding Officer for his comments just before mine, and thank him for presiding so that I can step down and speak briefly.

I wasn't sure if I was going to speak. I don't have any notes. But I was inspired by some of the comments that were made by the Senator from Vermont as I was presiding.

We heard—actually, for those who are visiting the DC area, if you don't get an opportunity to go to any of the wonderful theaters we have here, such as the Kennedy Center, don't worry because you are seeing a lot of theater down here on the Senate floor.

Anybody who would suggest that we are going to come back and cut my mother's Medicare and my mother's Social Security and that of the mothers and brothers and sisters of other people who are depending on that for their livelihood is somewhat involved in political theater.

Some of you were here and probably heard the challenge to have a Republican come down here on the floor and say: Bernie, you are wrong.

Well, the distinguished Senator from Vermont is wrong.

This bill is about actually providing freedom and tax relief to working families and reducing the tax burden on businesses so that the economy will grow and we will have the resources to pay our bills.

I can understand that maybe it is not intentional theater on the part of some of these folks; it may just be because they simply have never done it before. But if you have ever lived in North Carolina or if you have lived in North Carolina since 2011, you know that we did.

I have seen this theater before—from the dais as speaker of the house in the State of North Carolina when we were one of the highest—the sixth highest tax State in the Nation, with one of the slowest growing economies. We were having a problem paying our Medicaid bills. We were having a problem paying our bills. We had a \$2.5 billion structural deficit. I heard the theater on the floor: If you cut taxes, you are going to drive up the deficit. If you cut taxes, you are going to cut Medicaid. If you cut taxes, you are going to cut social services.

I heard it all. Everybody accused us of that. I hit the gavel, and I ratified the bill for tax reform. Guess what happened. We went from being the sixth most taxed State that today is in the top ten best taxed. We went from one of the worst performing State economies to now one of the best performing State economies. We have reduced the

number of people in poverty, and statistically—I mean, we can prove it to you. We do the counts. The number of people who have been lifted out of poverty has increased over the last 3 years. Median incomes have gone up. Job creation has gone up. Our gross domestic product has gone up over the past 5 or 6 years by \$80 billion. We were at about \$400 billion, and now we are at \$480 billion.

So let me tell you how we are going to pay for these tax cuts. We are not going to pay for them by cutting Medicare for seniors. We are going to pay for them through the economic activity that will absolutely occur if we have the courage to fulfill the promise that we made last year to the American people. We are going to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses. We are going to get our tax policy consistent and competitive with nations that are eating our lunch on locating business expansion and having businesses come offshore—away from the United States to more preferable tax jurisdictions, and we are going to change people's lives.

I am motivated to support this plan because I have been in a position of leadership where I had great people in my caucus who had the courage to fulfill a promise that I made if I became speaker of the house. Now we are at a point in time to do the same thing for America that we did for North Carolina. If we do it, it is going to be extraordinary.

Let me reduce it down to an answer I gave to a little boy yesterday. I think he was in fourth grade. I had a Skype video conference with an English as a second language class in an elementary school down in North Carolina. One of the little boys asked me a great question, and it is a question that has never been asked of me. I have been in politics only for about 12 years. But he said: What piece of legislation are you most proud of? What is the thing you are most proud of since you have been in the legislature?

I thought about it. It was a tough question because I can think of many things I have done. But then I went back to this little boy in the classroom, and I said: You know what, buddy, it was something I did back when I was speaker of the North Carolina House. By the way, if any politician tells you "I did this," they are invariably not telling you the truth because you don't get anything done unless the team commits to it. So I, along with a lot of people in North Carolina, decided that your parents could not afford to pay the bills. They were having a difficult time paying the utility bills, their rent, and their groceries, paying for food. So we decided we were going to do something to make sure that government gave your parents more money to make sure you could go to school, to make sure they could pay their bills, to make sure they could have a better paying job. And, buddy, that is the thing I am most proud of.

The thing I am most proud of was tax reform that produced results that are indisputable. I have seen the theater before, and it didn't work out too well because it proved to be fiction in North Carolina.

If we have the courage over the next couple of days to take that same vote here, we are going to see the same results for those working families and those job employers in the United States. So I hope all of the Members of this body recognize that we are not going to fund the tax cuts on the backs of people who need the help the most. That is absurd. It is unfair. It is theater. We are going to take care of them, and we are going to take care of everyone else who is relying on us, this caucus, to fulfill the promise we made, get the economy back on track, and start winning more than losing against our international competition. I am completely convinced that the bill that is going to be before us over the end of this week is going to do just that.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to speak about the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program, known as DACA. DACA, an Executive order of President Obama, provided temporary, renewable legal status for immigrant students if they registered with the government, paid a filing fee of \$500, passed a criminal and national security background check. About 780,000 young people stepped forward and did something they had been warned their entire lives never to do. Their parents knew they were undocumented. They knew that they had been brought to this country at an early age. They knew that they weren't technically legal, and their parents had warned them: Stay away from cops and government. All that can happen is that they will discover you are undocumented and deport you and maybe your family as well. Be careful.

So President Obama stepped up and said: If you will step forward, tell us who you are, and let us do a background check on you, we are going to give you a chance—a chance to earn your way to legal status in America—and 780,000 young people took that chance and signed up for DACA.

Just this last Monday I was up in New York City, and I went to Hunter College, which is part of the City University of New York, and there were about five young people on a forum with me to discuss this bill and the

issue of Dreamers and immigration. It was interesting because each one of them—bright students, impressive young people—before they would say anything, they would introduce themselves by saying something like "My name is Isadora, and I have 465 days." And the next one would say, "My name is Evelyn, and I have 270 days." They were telling me how much time they had left, protected, to continue on as students.

They know that President Trump's decision on September 5 to abolish DACA means that their protection is going to end as of March 5 next year, and then they face some terrible possibilities. The first is deportation. These people have turned themselves in. They have stepped up and identified themselves to our government with the belief that our government would not hold it against them, and now they worry that has changed. They are worried about what will happen to their family because they had the courage to come up and sign up for this program. These are very real, lifetime problems and challenges these young people face.

If you look through the list of those who could be affected if DACA disappears, as President Trump has called for on March 5, there are some heart-breaking stories. Do you know there are 900 DACA-protected young people who have volunteered and now serve in the U.S. military? That is right. Even though they are undocumented because of DACA, they were allowed to sign up for a program known as MAVNI, which is a specialized program for those who have talents that are needed in our military, and they literally signed up. Think of that for a moment. Here they are, illegal in America, undocumented in America, willing to risk their lives for America. Why? Because it is the only country they know. They have lived their whole lives here. They have gone to school here. They have pledged allegiance to that flag every day in the classroom. That was their flag, their national anthem, their country. But because they were brought here as children, toddlers, infants, necessary papers were not filed. They have no legal status in this country. Well, I hope we can change that.

When I asked President Obama to create this program by Executive order, he waited and worked for a year before he came up with it, and I thought it was a good program. It was controversial, but at least for these young people, it gave them a temporary renewable status, and that made all the difference in the world.

When Attorney General Sessions announced the end of DACA on September 5, the President challenged us. He challenged the Senate and the House of Representatives. He said: Do something about this. Pass a law. Take care of this problem.

I think DACA was legal, but I am not going to argue that point anymore. The new President does not, but I accept his challenge, and I think we all should.