

I have laid out a number of bills that actually have been scored to save money. Passing the Alexander-Murray bipartisan bill would save us money. We have the actual accounting to show it. Allowing for less expensive drugs from other countries would save money for consumers. It is pretty easy to understand. It is called capitalism. It creates competition.

For our own American drug companies—we are proud that they have developed lifesaving cures. They are important employers in our country. But if they refuse to bring down those prices and if they have a monopoly on the market, we should be bringing in competition. There are two ways to do it. One is generic, and that is making it easier to produce generic drugs, and also stopping big pharma companies from paying off generic companies—their competition—to keep their competitive products off the market. The other is simply allowing drugs from less expensive places, but safe places, like Canada. That is a bill I have put forward with Senator MCCAIN, but also Senator BERNIE SANDERS and I have worked on this, as well as many others. These are commonsense ideas. Yet we cannot even move to a vote. Why? Because the pharmaceutical companies don't want us to have that vote.

So I am asking my colleagues, No. 1, let's end the year with some common sense and pass two commonsense bills to help the American people with their healthcare, and those are the children's health insurance bill and the Alexander-Murray compromise to make some fixes to the Affordable Care Act. Then, when people are home for a week over the holidays, maybe they should start talking to their constituents, as I have. Maybe they should talk to their friends and their neighbors and see what they think about what is going on with prescription drug prices. Maybe they will come back with a New Year's resolution that they are no longer going to be completely beholden to the pharmaceutical companies, that they are willing to give the American people some relief and take these companies on and create some competition for America.

I thought this was supposed to be a capitalistic system. In a capitalistic system, you do not have monopolies for certain drugs. You do not have a drug like insulin, which has been around for decades, triple, so that one elderly constituent in my State actually saves the drops at the bottom of the injectors so they can use them the next day. That is what is happening, while at the pharmaceutical companies, they are taking home big bonuses at the end of the year.

I implore my colleagues, let's get these commonsense things done so you can go home and not think, when you are sitting there at your holiday dinner, that you have basically left millions of kids without healthcare, and then on New Year's, the next week, make a resolution to do what is right

for your constituents, not for the pharmaceutical companies.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr.

HOEVEN). The Senator from Rhode Island.

NET NEUTRALITY

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the Trump administration's irresponsible plans to dismantle net neutrality.

This is a very important and timely issue for Rhode Islanders. The Federal Communications Commission's—the FCC's—efforts to repeal net neutrality protections could have a devastating impact on students, small businesses, and ordinary Rhode Islanders who cannot afford to pay higher premiums on internet traffic.

I have joined many of my Democratic colleagues in urging the FCC to abandon its reckless plan because it would radically alter the free and open internet as we know it and be an abdication of the FCC's responsibility to protect consumers.

Net neutrality does something incredibly important. It requires internet providers to treat all data equally. Net neutrality ensures a level playing field for everyone on the internet. It means free and open access to websites and information.

Over the past 20 years, the internet has become central to the lives of Rhode Islanders and, indeed, millions of Americans—practically every American. From students completing homework assignments to small businesses conducting e-commerce, or family members communicating with loved ones on the other side of the country or the world, the internet is now our primary means of communication. As such, I believe this is an issue of fundamental fairness and equality of opportunity.

This proposed repeal of net neutrality protections undermines the principles of a free and open internet and could be an unprecedented giveaway to big broadband providers, benefiting a few large corporations at the expense of their customers who use and rely on affordable access to the internet every day.

Net neutrality protections also ensure that all content is treated equally. Without these rules, large internet service providers may choose to block, throttle, or prioritize certain internet traffic. Without these protections, big internet service providers will be given the power to erect virtual toll booths for some customers and fast lanes for others. As a result, the repeal of net neutrality rules will likely be bad for consumers, businesses, students, and everyday Americans who cannot afford to pay additional premiums for internet access.

If these rules are repealed, internet providers can essentially say, if you want a quick download from a Web site, you have to pay more. They can go to businesses and ask them to pay

more for this fast service. They can't do that today. Everyone is treated equally.

This is particularly important when it comes to small businesses. As I go around Rhode Island to small businesses, as I have done these last few weeks, one of the reasons they are growing is because they are starting to take a presence on the internet. They have an internet business; they are beginning to sell across the country or across the globe. A small business in Wickford, RI, East Greenwich, RI, or Smithfield, RI, is not going to be able to pay the same premium for access that Amazon or a big corporation like Walmart can, and they will be squeezed further. The reason a lot of these small businesses are able to keep a store open in Rhode Island—or anyplace else in the country—and employ local workers is because they are starting to see a share of their profit come from the internet. They would like to see that grow, but if that diminishes, then the pressure on them to stay in business locally becomes acute.

These are real consequences, not hypothetical. If these rules are repealed and net neutrality is done away with, the consequences for businesses, communities, and individuals will be significant.

Let me make another example. Places of learning like our libraries, schools, and institutions of higher education all rely on offering internet access, which is already expensive. I did a press event at a public library, and they pay significant amounts of money so they have broadband access, and it is a mecca for everyone to come. The head librarian told me that they have people sitting on their doorsteps in the morning before they open and after they close so they can get a broadband signal from the library. Why are they doing that? You can't get a job today unless you can get online because that is where they post job offerings, that is where you have to send your resume, that is where you have to get the response back when you have a job interview. If you can't get on the internet, the chances of getting a job today are close to zero. It was a lot different 20, 30, or 40 years ago, when you could go down to the factory, fill out the form, pass it over the divider to the person in charge, and they would give you a telephone call back or you would come back in a few days and see how you were doing.

Local libraries are also the place where students across Rhode Island and the Nation gain access to the internet to do their homework, apply to college and financial aid, and explore the world around them. This is particularly the case in poorer neighborhoods. They can't afford to have computers or internet in their home. If you go to the public library in South Providence, right next to St. Michael's Church, in the afternoon, the kids are all there and are on the computers doing their homework. They can't do

that, in many cases, at home. They simply don't have the access.

We are always sitting around here talking about how we have to educate our young people and how we have to get them ready for a technologically challenging world, and then we are about to pull the rug right out from underneath them because that library will not be able to afford access to some sites that these young people need.

It is not just the young people who are using the libraries; it is also seniors who want to stay in touch with their families. There are functions that are so critical—as I mentioned before, you literally cannot apply for a job today unless you can get online. How does a person struggling, particularly in low-income, working-class neighborhoods, get online when they can't afford already expensive service, which could be more expensive if these rules are withdrawn and net neutrality is abandoned?

I heard about all of this in detail when I visited the Providence Public Library. Providence is an urban center, so there are other ways, perhaps, to compensate for access to libraries. But when you go to a rural area, those libraries are especially important. More than 83 percent of libraries report that they serve as their community's only provider of free internet and computing services in rural areas. If you need free service, the only place you can go to is the library. This is going to put another cost on them at a time when public-private support is being diminished.

We have a tax bill pending before us that is going to eviscerate charitable contributions. It is going to take away the deduction. Some of that money goes to our public libraries. If it doesn't go there, they will not have access.

I mentioned small businesses because, as I said, this is particularly critical. We have seen an improving economy, and for a lot of small businesses, that is because they are starting to have a presence on the internet. If that presence now comes with a higher price because the providers can say that if you want to get access and fast downloads, you have to pay X, once again, that X to a small mom-and-pop business could be huge. That X to an Amazon or Walmart is just a rounding error.

We know it is going to happen. It is not fair. It undercuts what we think is the heart and soul—I know it is the heart and soul of our economy in Rhode Island for small business, and it is another big benefit for the well-to-do businesses that can pay more and will pay more. This is not a direction we should be going.

Even more disturbing is that the FCC's proposed action may be based on a skewed public record. As we all know, under the Administrative Procedure Act, when a rule or change is proposed, they have to take public comments. There are credible reports that bots—

the electronic networks of computers—impersonating Americans filed hundreds of thousands of phony comments to the FCC during their net neutrality policymaking process, thus distorting the public record. Their supposedly fact-based and comment-based approach could be fictitious. It could be a product of special interests who decided to link together thousands, or maybe hundreds of thousands, of computers that randomly generated messages—or not so randomly, but deliberately generated messages.

What we have done is join our colleagues, and we have urged that the FCC abandon this proposal. As I said, I have joined many of my colleagues in asking, at least, that the FCC delay the vote on net neutrality until it can conduct a thorough investigation to ensure that it has a clear and accurate understanding of the public's view on this important topic. It is not based on a group of individuals and many electronically linked computers; it is based on the true sentiment of a broad range of the public. At least delay the proceeding until you can assure us that.

Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case. This attempt appears to be part of a larger program the Trump administration is using to roll back regulations that protect ordinary working men and women throughout the country. The Chairman of the FCC, Ajit Pai, and the administration seem to say, very deliberately, that this is their goal. Just roll back regulations, without analysis that is appropriate, without a sensitivity to the benefits as well as the costs.

My view is that rather than trying to limit access to the internet, they should be doing things to make it easier, make it cheaper for small businesses, for libraries, for individual Americans to get on and use the internet, not to take advantage of the rule-making process to fatten the bottom line of big companies that are doing quite well already.

It is clear that the FCC should not vote this week, or ever, to repeal net neutrality protections that have benefited so many Rhode Islanders and Americans. I urge my colleagues to join me in opposition to the FCC's proposed dismantling of the net neutrality rules. It is important. It is important for our constituents. It is important for our small businesses. It is important for our future generations as they prepare for a very complicated and challenging world, and, for some of them, the only way to get access to the computer is the public library. The only access for a small business to the new marketplace on the net is being able to afford to be on the net. That is all in jeopardy today. I hope we can stop these net neutrality rule appeals, and do it immediately.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, as a U.S. Senator, one of the most important and consequential choices I make is whether or not to support a judicial nominee.

The men and women of the bench are often the final gatekeepers of our Nation's justice system—and the right kind of judge shows up to work every day to make the system work for every citizen, free from prejudice or bias.

With that principle in mind, I strongly oppose the three nominees for the circuit court whose nominations are before the U.S. Senate.

While President Trump has the right to make nominations, Members of this Senate also have the right to reject those nominations.

It is clear, based on the records of the three nominees before us, that is exactly what Members of this Senate ought to do.

Vote no.

Don't be a rubberstamp for this President's hateful agenda or his obvious disdain for the rule of law.

The first nominee this Senate should reject is Leonard Grasz, whom President Trump picked to serve on the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Mr. Grasz is a notable nominee but for all the wrong reasons.

He is notable because his peers at the American Bar Association unanimously found Mr. Grasz "not qualified"—just the third nominee in nearly 30 years to receive this distinction.

The ABA report shows his peers questioned whether Mr. Grasz could look past his "deeply-held social agenda and political loyalty to be able to judge objectively, with compassion and without bias.

These are serious red flags—and it is unconscionable for any of my colleagues to turn a blind eye to relevant information regarding Mr. Grasz's ability to do his job fairly.

I am also disturbed by the willingness of several of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to slander the nonpartisan ABA as some sort of liberal front group instead of evaluating its factual assessment.

The ABA has done this body a great service of neutral and fair evaluation over many decades, for which Members of the Senate should be grateful.

I also have grave concerns regarding Don Willett, one of two nominees for the Fifth Circuit.

Mr. Willett has been unabashed in his criticism of equal rights for women—expressing caustic views on pay equity, justice for sexual assault survivors, and age discrimination.

He has resisted equality for LGBTQ Americans and defied the key same-sex marriage ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court.

No judge who thumbs their nose at the Supreme Court is fit for a lifetime appointment.

No person who compares the right of one person to marry the person they love to a "right to marry bacon" is fit to administer justice in this country.

President Trump's other nominee for the Fifth Circuit, James Ho, has a similarly disturbing track record on LGBTQ rights.

He has also called for eliminating all restrictions on campaign finance and is

an ardent defender of giving the executive branch even more power.

I can see why President Trump would want Mr. Ho on the court, but Mr. Ho's pattern of giving more leeway to the executive branch should be deeply concerning to everyone else.

In sum, the three nominees President Trump sent to this Senate for review fall far short of the standards this Senate should demand or that this country deserves.

I want to make clear that these nominees have a completely backward and harmful record on women's constitutionally protected reproductive rights—and would seek to undermine *Roe v. Wade*.

Stacking our courtrooms with judges who will bend to the will of one President's hateful, divisive agenda is wrong—and will not be forgotten.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to take a stand. Reject President Trump's politically driven attacks on women's health and rights. Reject efforts to chip away at fundamental rights and respect for the LGBTQ community, and reject his judicial nominees who will serve only to give him the green light to expand his own power.

Vote no on circuit court nominees Leonard Grasz, Don Willett, and James Ho.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I rise to vote against Leonard Grasz's nomination to serve as a circuit judge for the Eighth Circuit. Mr. Grasz is one of two Trump judicial nominees who has received an "unqualified" ranking from the nonpartisan American Bar Association, ABA. I am appalled that Republicans advanced this nominee out of the Judiciary Committee and are bringing this vote to the floor.

Republicans have made it their mission to fill our judiciary with radical ideologues. The Trump administration has outsourced judicial nominations to the Federalist Society and the Heritage Foundation, and their nominees have included a nominee who believed in corporal punishment, one who questioned the constitutionality of the 14th Amendment, and one equated a woman's right to an abortion to chattel slavery. Many of these nominees are simply unfit to serve and undeserving of the prestige of receiving a lifetime appointment.

No judge nominated by the Obama administration received an "unqualified" ABA rating. When asked to clarify their rating for Mr. Grasz, a spokesperson for the ABA said that "[t]he evaluators and the Committee found that [Mr. Grasz's] temperament issues, particularly bias and lack of open-mindedness, were problematic. The evaluators found that the people interviewed believed that the nominee's bias and the lens through which he viewed his role as a judge colored his ability to judge fairly." I am disappointed that, instead of insisting on qualified nominees, my colleagues have decided to instead attack the ABA's ranking system.

I sincerely hope that many of my colleague across the aisle will vote no against this nominee and demand more from the Trump administration.

Mr. REED. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, a number of Senators have inquired about the status of the tax legislation and, particularly, the prospect of a real conference committee. It is clear that Republicans are talking among themselves, but apparently they feel, with respect to Democrats, this is a conference in name only.

What I would like to do is spell out what we know to date and talk a bit about what would really be in the public's interest. Specifically, late last night, the public learned through the press that Republicans have made no progress—their words, not mine—with respect to the tax bill.

They said that all of the major issues were still outstanding. Then, when all of them got up and made their way through their breakfast cornflakes, we were told that, magically, everything had just been worked out—that everything was worked out and that this bill would be ready to go.

I know they have been trying to move at the speed of light. We had yet another dose of fake math yesterday when the Treasury Department reported its so-called analysis to project that this bill would generate great growth, when, in fact, it comes up \$1 trillion short. So I would like to make sure the public understands what is on offer as of right now.

My sense is, with respect to the key issue, which is the well-being of the middle class, millions and millions of middle-class people are going to get hurt by this legislation, millions of them very quickly—for example, millions are going to lose their health insurance coverage. Millions more are going to have high premiums. By 2027, half of the middle class in America will actually be paying more in taxes.

Senate Republicans seem to be talking about a variety of issues, but not one of the tax issues they are talking about involves bettering the quality of life for America's middle class. We don't hear any discussion of that. We hear plenty of discussion about multinational corporations. We hear plenty of discussion about rates. We hear discussions about pass-through businesses. But all of this is really like rearranging the chairs at the country club. Maybe one day the multinational corporations will do a little bit better; maybe the next day well-off heirs will do a little better. What I heard at my

recent town hall meetings is that the American people want to make sure that the middle class is not always getting the shaft. They want to make sure, for example, that in the tax law, the breaks for the multinational corporations aren't permanent and the breaks for the middle class aren't temporary. They want everybody to have a chance to get ahead. It is not too late to change course.

There are 17 moderate Democrats, led by our colleagues Senator MANCHIN and Senator Kaine, who have said that they are hungry for a bipartisan approach to bringing both sides together. I have introduced two comprehensive, bipartisan bills with senior conservative Republicans—close allies of MITCH MCCONNELL's. We have made it very clear that we want a bipartisan bill.

In that all of these changes are now being discussed and our fellow Americans can read about them in the press, take a look and see if you see one idea—even one—that is going to make life better for the vast majority of working Americans, the folks who work so hard day in and day out, who are walking on an economic tightrope, trying to save money and trying to educate their kids. We don't hear about one single idea—not one—that would make life better for the middle class.

We will have more to say about this tomorrow as, I gather, there may be some kind of ceremonial conference committee that is scheduled as they try to sort through all of these reports that they are getting from lobbyists on K Street because, I guess, lobbyists know lots about what the Republicans in the leadership and on the conference committee are talking about.

I want Americans to just read through all of this and look, line by line, to try to find anything that is going to make life better for the middle class, because I cannot find it. That, as much as anything, shows what is wrong with the way this legislation is being pursued.

What a difference from the way Ronald Reagan pursued tax reform. Ronald Reagan said point blank that the working person should at least get as good a deal as the investor. He said that we ought to have the same rate of taxation for workers as we have for investors. In fact, with Ronald Reagan—and I voted for his bill—the corporations, in effect, gave up some money to help the workers. Now what we are seeing is the workers getting the short end of the stick so that the multinational corporations can do even better. We will have more to say tomorrow.

I urge people to look through all of these stories and all of these press reports and see if they can find anything that involves a change to make life better for the hard-working middle class of our country.

REMEMBERING VERA KATZ

Mr. President, I also come this afternoon to talk about the passing of a vintage Oregonian and an extraordinary