

to our military—and to all parts of our government—so that the men and women of our all-volunteer force can continue to keep our country safe.

TAX CUTS AND JOBS BILL

Now, on a final matter, Mr. President, yesterday, Congress moved closer to delivering much-needed tax relief to American families and small businesses as Members of the House and the Senate held a public meeting of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act conference committee. The conferees discussed the best way to provide tax reform to families and small businesses across our country. Throughout this process, we have focused on the middle class and on those left behind by the Obama economy—like many of the families in Kentucky who I represent.

By overhauling our broken and outdated Tax Code, we are working to seize this once-in-a-generation opportunity to grow paychecks, create more jobs, and help our economy reach its full potential. The plan before the conference committee will also end many of the perverse incentives for corporations to ship American jobs overseas. We want to bring those jobs and investments home and keep them here.

Once the committee completes its work to reconcile the differences between each Chamber's bill, every Member of Congress will have the opportunity to cast a vote to provide meaningful tax relief to middle-class Americans. That should be something we all can support. And when Congress does, this bill will go to the President's desk to become law.

I would like to thank every Member who has contributed to making tax reform a reality, following years of hearings and proposals and a multitude of amendments as this legislation proceeded through regular order.

This is a chance to work together to get the economy going again and lift up the families that the Obama Administration's policies left behind. I hope that we can take this opportunity to move beyond partisanship to deliver real tax reform for the middle class. Many of the provisions of this bill are based on ideas that our friends across the aisle used to say they supported. I hope our friends will support them again.

I would like to once again commend the conferees for their work, and I look forward to voting on the committee report soon.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak about business that is important to Kansas and impor-

tant to the country but especially important to the providers of healthcare for children, the children, and their families who receive that coverage and care; that is, the Medicaid CHIP program. It was established in 1997.

I call to the attention of my colleagues the importance of us acting in the next several days in regard to the reauthorization extension of the CHIP program. It has helped provide coverage to children of low-income families in my State and those individuals who would otherwise be left without any insurance and most likely, in every case, the funds necessary to cover healthcare costs for the well-being of those young men and women.

This program is funded through a multiyear authorization that requires Congress to take action each time the program reaches the end of that authorization. The end of that authorization occurred on September 30, now several months ago. While I have been assured in my State that there are sufficient funds to get us through the end of the year, I am concerned. In fact, the belief is, we may have enough funds to pay for our insurance program through March. That certainly is probably not the case across the United States, and we need to act within a few short days. I hope this is an issue that is addressed, as the continuing resolution that funds the Federal Government expires on December 22. As we respond to that circumstance, we ought to respond to the expiration of the CHIP program that occurred on September 30.

Waiting to reauthorize that program has already created an unnecessary burden, but if we waited any longer, it would create even more unnecessary burdens for families of more than 9 million children who are currently receiving healthcare through that program.

Temporary funding measures have kept the program solvent since the program expired, but now is the time to act, to provide some certainty and make sure the funds continue to be available. In Kansas, it would leave about 79,000 children without coverage or other good options.

Many of our Nation's best children's hospitals serve a great deal of patients through that CHIP program. We are fortunate in our area to have Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, and those hospitals and other providers rely upon the CHIP program to pay their bills as well. With all the costs associated with healthcare and with the inability of people to pay, the burden then falls upon hospitals and others to figure out how they survive. In Kansas, almost every hospital—127 of them in our State—continues to hang on by a thread, and some may not survive. This is another opportunity for us to strengthen and provide certainty that a mechanism will be in place so that when they provide care to children of Medicaid families, they will be reimbursed. That benefits all of us in

our healthcare delivery system and provides more stability and more certainty in these challenging times for healthcare providers across Kansas.

I am happy the House of Representatives has passed reauthorization. They did their bill. It is now time for the Senate to act. The Finance Committee has taken its action, but this bill is still pending on the floor of the U.S. Senate. During this Christmas season, this holiday time, parents should not have to wonder what they will do in the absence of this insurance program that allows their children to receive routine care and, in many instances, lifesaving care.

Continuing to delay action on this bill is not in the best interest of the American people. It would be nice, it would be appreciated by Americans to see the U.S. Senate work on a program that has broad bipartisan support but still, for some reason, can't get it across the finish line. That finish line, I suppose, was September 30, but I would say that finish line is now the end of the year, and specifically December 22, with the CR expiring at that point in time. It is time for Congress to take action in that regard.

My plea on the Senate floor this morning is for the U.S. Senate to take legislative action and reauthorize this program, provide certainty, and care for our country's children who are, without this program, in significant jeopardy of having an absence of healthcare.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the U.S. Senate.

I yield back.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on the year-end negotiations, they are making headway—that is good—but many issues still remain to be resolved.

We need to provide funding for community health centers, CHIP, and areas that have been hit by disasters. We need to pass a bipartisan deal to pair the Dream Act with border security and pass a budget deal that fully funds both our national security and our economic security, in the common parlance known as “parity.”

If we don't lift the spending caps for defense and also urgent domestic priorities—jobs, the economy—both will come under the specter of sequestration. Lifting those spending caps in equal measure has been the basis of successful budget agreements going back several years.

There has been parity between defense and nondefense for the last three

budget negotiations. That is how it ought to stay. That is what brought us to good agreements. That is what averted shutdowns. Unfortunately, it appears that the Freedom Caucus in the House, which doesn't represent the mainstream of America or even the mainstream of Republicans, is trying to derail another successful parity agreement. Unfortunately, Speaker RYAN, as he is doing far too often, to the detriment of the country and his party, is just following its lead.

Last night, the House posted what is called a CROmnibus—a very short-term extension of funding for jobs and economic development that will lead to cuts in those areas but a long-term extension and a large increase of funding for defense. This is merely a ruse that is designed to slash funding for education, healthcare, infrastructure, and scientific research—all things the Freedom Caucus doesn't want the government to fund—against the will of the overwhelming majority of Americans.

At this late hour, it is also an unfortunate waste of precious time. Earlier this week, 44 Senate Democrats sent a letter to our Republican colleagues that explicitly warned them that Democrats could not support such an approach. Because 60 votes are needed to advance a spending bill here in the Senate, House Republicans should have known not to waste everyone's time with a partisan spending bill that could never pass in the Senate.

The CROmnibus is nothing but a spectacle—a charade, a sop—to some militant, hard-right people who don't want the government to spend money on almost anything. It is a perilous waste of time as the clock ticks closer and closer to the end of the year.

It is time for our Republican colleagues—especially in the House, where the Freedom Caucus is like the tail wagging the dog—to get serious about working with Democrats toward a real parity agreement. Every hour that the House spends on the CROmnibus is an hour that could be spent on our working on a deal to avert a shutdown and solve the many pressing issues that Congress must grapple with before the end of the year.

If Speaker RYAN decides to press forward with a CROmnibus, it will quickly fail in the Senate, and we can get back to negotiating a real bipartisan agreement that will provide certainty and full funding to both our national defense and the middle class. Speaker RYAN has gone along with this approach three times in a row—or the House Republicans have. I think RYAN was the Speaker for two of those three and was the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee for the third. Right now, Speaker RYAN is pursuing a dead-end strategy. Instead, we urge him to continue working with Democrats on a bipartisan, long-term agreement that will keep the government open and fund our major priorities—defense, with jobs and the economy on the other side.

By the way, even on the other side of the ledger, the things that affect our security, like the border and the FBI, are funded on the nondefense side, and you have to have security in every way in this terrorism-ridden world in which we live.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. President, a word on the Republican tax bill. On both process and substance, it appears that the Republicans' conference committee is making all the mistakes that the Republicans made when they passed their bill in the first place. Even though there is still not a final agreement on the text of the tax bill, Republican leaders promise a vote on the committee report as early as Monday of next week. I am not sure that my colleagues will have had enough time to have read and digested the bill that passed this Chamber a few weeks ago, let alone an entirely new conference report that will include many changes. It is the same rushed, awful process as before, and it can only result in mistakes and unintended consequences that could wreak havoc on the economy. Why are our Republican colleagues rushing this bill through? I think that they are ashamed of it.

Every day, the more people know about the bill, the more they don't like it. Just in the polling data today, it shows that the popularity of the bill continues to plummet, and a poll out today said it is not just that the people do not like the bill but that those who vote for it will be affected at election time. The poll today asked people if they were more or less likely to vote for a Congressman who would vote for this bill or to vote for a Senator who would vote for this bill. Many in the public said that they were less likely to vote for a Congressman who would vote for this awful bill. The public knows that it is awful. Why? They know that Republicans are doubling down in this new proposal on the core mistake of their bill by tilting it even further in favor of the wealthy.

I saw on TV this morning a guy from the Club for Growth and a guy from—I forgot the name—another group. These are narrow, narrow groups that have very little support and that are funded by the hard-right group of billionaires who want to see their taxes cut. They don't even talk about what is in the bill. They try to talk about its being a job creator, but they dare don't say, like so many of my Republican colleagues, how disproportionately it goes to those in the upper incomes and not to the middle class.

Amazingly enough, behind closed doors, they have made a bad bill even worse. One of the most significant changes that have been made by the conference committee will be to lower the top tax rate 2 percentage points more than in the original bill. Let's help those millionaires get an even lower tax rate than they have now, for they are doing so poorly. This is crazy. There are a lot of wealthy people in

America. God bless them. I don't resent their wealth, but they don't need a tax break. On the other hand, there are hundreds of millions of struggling middle-class people, and they could use that kind of money. Yet millions of people in this bill who are middle class, upper middle class, and who are struggling to be middle class get a tax increase. Instead of lowering the rate on the highest income people, why not use the money to help those in the middle?

Despite all of the concerns about raising middle-class taxes, which makes the bill as unpopular as I just mentioned, the one big thing that Republicans go back and change is the rate paid by the wealthiest of Americans. They lower it. When it comes down to a choice between the middle class and the wealthy and the middle class and big corporations, the Republicans just instinctively, atavistically—in a knee-jerk way—choose the wealthy and the powerful over the middle class. That is why they are struggling.

I believe that is why President Trump's numbers are as low as they have ever been. People are getting a feel—a smell—in that President Trump talks about the middle class, but when he acts, like in this tax bill, it is to help the wealthiest and the most powerful. That happens with issue after issue.

I see that my colleague DICK BLUMENTHAL, the Senator from Connecticut, has come to the floor. He is going to talk about net neutrality, I believe. Again, help the big cable companies and the corporations, and make it harder for the middle class when it comes to cable service and the cost of cable.

Republicans claim that lowering the top rate is an attempt to address tax hikes that would result from their plan to gut the State and local deduction, but reducing the top rate only helps the very wealthy—couples who make over \$1 million in the last draft that we heard about—but they are already the prime beneficiaries of this tax plan.

I have a feeling that President Trump was hearing from his handful of wealthy friends who pay a lot in State and local taxes, many from my home State of New York. He decided, well, I will lower their taxes even more. But 99 percent of State and local deductions are taken by Americans with incomes under \$1 million. More than half of the taxpayers who take the SALT deduction make less than \$100,000. Reducing the top rate does nothing to help the 99 percent of taxpayers who take SALT. It only helps the top 1 percent, who make over \$1 million. But this is what, it seems, the President and our Republican colleagues in the House and the Senate keep doing.

As I have said from the start, eliminating or cutting the State and local deduction would hurt the middle class across the country. It would raise taxes on millions, lower home values for millions more, and gut our State and local