

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. CASEY. Madam President, I rise this afternoon to talk about the Children's Health Insurance Program and, particularly, the reauthorization of that program. By reauthorization I mean taking action to continue a program that is not just worthy but battle-tested now for almost a quarter of a century nationally, at least 20 years. In States like Pennsylvania, it is more than 20 years, more like 25.

The unfortunate reality, though, is this isn't done. This program should have been reauthorized at the end of September, and it is not done yet. It has gone from unacceptable to inexcusable. We should not leave this week without either having it reauthorized or having a game plan that would guarantee it will be reauthorized in the very early days of 2018, literally, the early days of January.

In just the last 2 weeks, I met with families across Pennsylvania and even families that came from beyond Pennsylvania here to Washington to talk about what the Children's Health Insurance Program means to them.

CHIP provides health insurance to some 9 million American children each year, including over 342,000 children in Pennsylvania, if you look at it over the course of the year. As you might recall, when the CHIP program expired on September 30, there were a lot of indications or promises made that it would be reauthorized rather soon, but that was 81 days ago. Whether you want to express it in days or months—81 days or 2½ months or more now—that is inexcusable. We have to get this done for these families.

I just saw a report this morning on "NBC News" that profiled a family. They were talking in this case to the mom and talking to her children, and it was a very moving story about the importance of the Children's Health Insurance Program and what would happen to that family if the program were not reauthorized.

This is a bipartisan program. It was bipartisan in its inception in the mid-1990s, and it has remained bipartisan. Now there is only one party that runs the House, the Senate, and the administration, and I hope that this one party—in this case, the Republican Party—can get the votes. You don't even have to talk about votes. It is really talking about floor time and really making sure there is an agreement on a pay-for.

The most recent action by the Finance Committee on CHIP was in the Keep Kids' Insurance Dependable and Secure Act, known by the acronym KIDS. The KIDS Act came through the Finance Committee by a voice vote.

That almost never happens, even on reauthorization. There was a voice vote on October 4. It seems like a long time ago now. It is ready to go. If it came onto the Senate floor, we can pass it here. I have to ask: Why isn't that happening?

Maybe the better person to ask that question would be a family who is benefiting and who could be harmed if it is not reauthorized. I am thinking about Connie, a woman I met here in Washington just last week. Then, I saw her again on Monday in Pittsburgh at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. That is one of those great institutions for children across our country. She was there with two of her children. Carmen and Diego are both on the CHIP program. CHIP provides good health insurance so that they can get the healthcare they need.

I had a picture with Connie's daughter Carmen here in Washington. She dutifully handed me a copy of the picture when I saw her just a few days later in Pittsburgh at Children's Hospital.

Both Carmen and Diego might lose their health insurance because there is a lot of activity here and focus and a result when it comes to a big tax bill. In this case, it is a tax bill that gives permanent corporate tax cuts to multinational, profitable corporations. At the same time, there is almost no action or any sense of momentum right now to get the Children's Health Insurance Program in place again, or reauthorized, as we call it.

We had an event here in Washington yesterday where not only were there child advocates but so many others coming together to talk about this program. Maybe the most important thing we did yesterday, in addition to the mechanics, was to talk about the children in the room. Here are the children and the States they came from. I will just read through them quickly: Jason and Kelsey from Utah; Deanna came from New York; Malachi came from Colorado; Addie and Cailin from Kentucky; Patience, Serenity, Tyler, and Harmonie, all from the State of Texas; Jeridan, Kendra, and Makayla from the State of Wisconsin; and, finally, another Michaela—spelled a different way—and Grace came from the State of West Virginia. They and their parents—these children and their parents—spoke about what CHIP means to their families. Several of the parents said CHIP means their children can get the prescription eyeglasses they need.

I have to ask: How is a child supposed to learn and succeed in school without eyeglasses? CHIP provides that.

So while these kids don't know if they are going to be able to get the glasses they need to be able to read and to learn, the Senate is busy passing a tax bill. It is OK to pass a tax bill, even if I didn't agree with it, but we should find the time in the remaining hours of this year to get CHIP done.

I saw a tweet just 2 days ago that said the following: "Congress must

renew funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program so the parents of the nine million children who are covered by CHIP can know their children's healthcare is secure."

The good news about that tweet is, it was a Member of Congress. The even better news is, it was a Senator. Better news even than that, the Senator happened to be the Senate majority leader, Senator McCONNELL.

I ask Senator McCONNELL, please allow floor time and please obtain the consensus you need in your own party to get this on to the floor and get it passed.

As I said, the KIDS Act, the Finance Committee bill, is ready to go. I ask for the majority leader's help because I know he cares about this program as well. We have to get this done.

Just a final note before I yield the floor. I wanted to note several other healthcare priorities that Congress must address.

Community health centers are facing a funding cliff that will hurt millions of people around the country, and over 800,000 in Pennsylvania whom they serve, and other priority community health centers. Medicare extenders—meaning tax provisions that are extended from one year to the next or from one year into the future—including support for rural hospitals and lifting the so-called therapy cap to ensure seniors and people with disabilities have access to physical and occupational therapy services have also expired, just like the CHIP program, or will expire at the end of this calendar year. Failing to address these extensions is also unacceptable and will harm our children, our seniors, and our communities.

So we have a lot of work to do in a short amount of time on all of these healthcare issues. I think we should start with voting on and reauthorizing the Children's Health Insurance Program for 9 million American children.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TAX REFORM BILL

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, last night—I guess, actually, early this morning—was a pretty historic time for us. Our final vote to approve the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was a historic moment for America, and it was clearly a historic moment for my State of Alaska.

For the first time in 31 years, since President Reagan was in office, we passed tax reform that will make our Tax Code work better for American families and businesses.

After 37 long years—yesterday, I said it was 38. I stand corrected. It was 37 years. That is a long time that we have been working to advance the opportunity to open a small portion of the non-wilderness 1002 area in northeast Alaska, up in our North Slope, to responsible energy development.

Many in our State believed this would happen in the early 1980s after Congress specifically set aside the 1002 area for exploration—and it is something we have been fighting for ever since. It is a long time to be working on an issue. It has been decades and, in many instances, generations.

Through this bill, we voted to let Americans keep more of their hard-earned dollars. We voted to make our businesses more competitive on a global scale. We voted to strengthen our Nation's energy security. And we voted to create new jobs, new wealth, and new prosperity for a generation to come.

One thing we know for sure is that legislation like this doesn't happen by accident. It doesn't happen quickly or with the sleight of hand. It happens with a considerable amount of work. So I wish to take a few moments this afternoon to simply say thank you—thank you to those who have worked so hard and for so long to help us reach this point.

I want to start by personally acknowledging our majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL. He was the first one I went to back in early January to ask about how we might be able to proceed to include the opening of the 1002 area. We discussed avenues and opportunities. He told me he thought we could make it work, and he committed to me that we would work to do just that. He did, and I thank him for his considered effort and his belief in the cause.

I also need to thank and recognize our Budget Committee chairman, Senator ENZI. He was the second person I went to early this year. He agreed to provide an instruction in the reconciliation bill and allow us to run with this opportunity. He, too, recognized the significance of this as a policy initiative and how it dovetailed with what he was seeking to achieve through the Budget Committee.

The work of many within the Energy and Natural Resources Committee is significant, and I thank them for their efforts. An excellent group of Senators in that committee worked with me to craft our energy title and to report it out of the committee. We reported it on a bipartisan basis—not as strong as I would have liked, but we did receive support from our colleague Senator MANCHIN, from West Virginia. Again, it was a solid effort by the committee, and it was a good and important part of the process.

Along similar lines, I would like to thank all of the Members of this Chamber who supported our work here on the Senate floor—first, to protect the instruction and then to protect our good work to meet it.

For some, ANWR has been an issue which they have had an opportunity to weigh in and vote on for many years and thus was not a new matter in which education was needed. For others, it was important to be able to update them, to let them know that many of the issues they may have heard over the years were outdated, that the arguments were stale and needed to be refreshed, thus allowing them to understand what we are doing with new technology. Today, technology is helping us to facilitate development in a way that allows us to access more resources with less of a footprint, with less land, and with less intrusion on the surface, working to ensure that we are not only protecting the wildlife that is there, whether it be caribou or polar bears, but also ensuring that the people who live there in the 1002 region—the people of Kaktovik, the children who are going to school there, those who have called this place home for decades, if not centuries—will have an opportunity there not only for the potential for jobs, but for what the resources will bring to them.

I thank my colleagues for being open to the new reality of what we have been developing in Alaska's North Slope, as we have been seeking to provide resources the country needs, jobs my State and the country need, and truly to help us from an energy security and a national security perspective. So I thank the Members of the Senate.

I thank the members of the Finance Committee, led by Chairman HATCH, for their excellent work and for letting us ride shotgun when it came to tax reform. We knew we had to make it to the finish line together, and that is exactly where we are right now.

I thank the President and Secretary Zinke, among others in this administration, who have been working with us, fighting for Alaska, as we have moved forward.

Of course, this wasn't just a Members-led effort. We could not have done it without the men and the women who work for us and whom we work for in many ways but who were at the very core of the effort.

As usual, within the Energy Committee, certainly it is always a team effort. Everyone contributed in a rock-solid way. My team was very ably led by Brian Hughes, supported by Kellie Donnelly, Lucy Murfitt, Chuck Kleeschulte, Patrick McCormick, Annie Hoefler, Brianne Miller, Nicole Daigle, Michelle Lane, Lane Dickson, Isaac Edwards, Chester Carson, Ben Reinke, Suzanne Cunningham, Melissa Enriquez, Sean Solie, John Starkey, Tonya Parish, Robert Ivanauskas, Barbara Repeta, and Diana Nielsen. There were so many on the committee who came together in a host of different ways, some of them working the issue new; others, like Chuck Kleeschulte—27 years working here in the U.S. Senate and, prior to that, working for the

State of Alaska. If there is anyone who has a collective history and wisdom about the background of ANWR and the battles we have endured, it is Chuck Kleeschulte. I know that, as he is approaching retirement, he is looking forward to knowing that we have successfully moved this opportunity forward for Alaskans and for the Nation.

I also thank those in my personal office who helped not only with ANWR but with the tax provisions as well. My chief of staff, Mike Pawlowski, has done an extraordinary job for me. My assistant, Kristen Daimler-Nothdurft, has done amazing things. Karina Petersen, Garrett Boyle, Madeline Lefton, and Parker Haymans, among many others—you really recognize a team when you reflect on how so many have given in so many different ways.

It is not just within my own office or the Energy Committee; it is those who run the operations here. Specifically, I want to thank Leader MCCONNELL's staff—Sharon Soderstrom, Hazen Marshall, and Terry Van Doren—and especially the outstanding floor staff here, led by Laura Dove. I know many of them—certainly Laura and Sharon—have been around for their fair share of the ANWR debates and fights, and this is no new issue for them. I appreciate their help and their support a great deal.

From Budget, I thank Betsy McDonnell, Eric Ueland, Paul Vinovich, and Alison McGuire.

From Finance, I thank and congratulate Jay Khosla, who has done a terrific job, and Mark Prater. I had the added benefit of going to law school with Mark Prater, a brilliant guy then and even more brilliant now. I greatly appreciate all they did on the tax reform bill.

I also want to give a shout-out to Tara Shaw, who is now with Senator ENZI and who has been a good friend and a help to me.

Lastly and certainly not least, I thank all of the Alaskans who have contributed to this effort over the years. We had a group of about two dozen Alaskans who traveled all the way from Alaska's North Slope—some 5,000 miles—to be here last night for this vote. These are men and women who, for decades now, have fought to open up the 1002 area for the opportunities it presents to them and to their families. For them, to see this advance is as significant and as historic as most anything they have seen in a considerable period of time.

Oliver Leavitt is an elder. He is certainly a legend in my time. To have Oliver here last night was extraordinarily significant. Matthew Rexford and Fenton Rexford, who live in Kaktovik—there were four or five different individuals from the village of Kaktovik—again, those who actually reside in the 1002 area. Crawford Patkotak and his wife, Laura, were also with us and also Richard Glenn of Utqiagvik. They were here not only to

be a part of the culmination of this effort, but they are men and women who have been part of this battle for decades, truly decades. The number of trips they have made to Washington, DC, over the years, the doors they have knocked on, and the efforts they have contributed to are considerable.

When I start to name names, I think of Tara Sweeney and the folks who have been there year in and year out, those who have been supportive by traveling here and those who call and those who write.

It is gratifying, it is heartwarming, and it is a reality that one can never say thank you enough for the efforts that you have made over the years. To know that you spoke as Alaskans, your voices have been heard, and that Congress has finally listened is, indeed, gratifying.

Of course, we would not have reached this point without two particular Alaskans—the ones I am proud to serve with here in our delegation. DON YOUNG, the dean of the House and Congressman for all Alaska, has single-handedly kept this issue alive in the House for a generation. He reminds me that it has been 13 times now that he has passed it out of the House. To be able to recognize his extraordinary work is, indeed, a pleasure and an honor. And, of course, my friend, my very able partner in the Senate, Senator DAN SULLIVAN, was an incredible partner in this effort, and I thank him greatly for his work.

I also recognize that it is not just the delegation present who needs to be thanked. As I have said, this has been a decades-long battle. This has been a generational battle. We are standing in the footsteps of those who have preceded us, including my father, Frank Murkowski, who was chairman of the Energy Committee and at a point in time had advanced this, only to see it fail at the very end. And, of course, my dear friend, my mentor, one who helped give me such great guidance over the years was our former Senator, Ted Stevens.

Yesterday, you may have noticed I was wearing some unusual earrings. When my friend Ted, the former Senator Stevens, had a serious matter in front of him, he wanted the rest of his colleagues to know that, by gosh, he was serious that day, and this was an issue to be taken seriously, and he would don a Hulk tie. It was somewhat legendary around here. I am not one to wear ties, but after finding a nice pair of Hulk earrings, it seemed to me only appropriate to wear them on a day that would acknowledge the work of extraordinary Alaskans who went before me. I think, today, Uncle Ted is smiling and happy, and he is probably wearing his Hulk tie.

This is a big moment for Alaska. There is a spirit and an optimism that I am taking home right now that I think we haven't seen in years. I think it is worth noting that today is winter solstice. This is the shortest day of the

year—today and tomorrow. In Alaska, it is the darkest day of the year. I mentioned yesterday the effort we have seen from the Senate, which, hopefully, we will finalize shortly, is one that will bring a brightness and an energy to the people of Alaska. For that, I thank my colleagues. I thank the many Alaskans who have supported us in this epic battle, and I thank all those who have helped to make it possible.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. STRANGE). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EDUCATION

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, unlike most of my colleagues, the time I spent here in the Senate represents the sum total of my experience in elected office. For most of my life I approached politics and public policy from a very different perspective. I tried to be an educated citizen who understood how the issues being debated here in Washington affected me, my family, my neighbors, and those in my State and my country. I tried to be an advocate for the values I believed in—honesty in public discourse, for sure, but also fairness, justice, and the idea that in America we are all in this together. I tried to be an activist, putting my voice and my energy behind candidates and causes that I cared for and about.

When I leave the Senate in a few weeks, I will continue trying to be an educated citizen, an advocate, and an activist. Over the last 8½ years, as I have had the privilege of serving the people of Minnesota, I also gained a new perspective on the issues we face and the way we here in Washington make decisions.

Before I go, I want to spend some time sharing some of what I have learned in a series of speeches focusing on the challenges I came to Washington to address—challenges that my colleagues will continue to wrestle with, challenges that will determine not just the political landscape we leave for the next generation of Senators but what kind of country we leave for the next generation of Americans.

Today I want to start by talking about education. Even at a time when our politics is more polarized and more poisonous than it has ever been, you would think that education is one place where Democrats and Republicans could come together to make progress. After all, while we do have significant differences on the details of education policy, nobody disagrees about the importance of getting it right. We all agree that education from pre-K through college and beyond is es-

sential to providing our economy with a skilled workforce that is ready to innovate and lead us into the future.

Ever since I have been here, employers in Minnesota have stressed to me that they need employees with critical thinking and problem solving skills, with team work and creativity—tools that we need our children to be developing long before they enter the workforce. I am pretty sure that my colleagues hear this from employers in their States too.

Of course, education isn't just about our economy. It is about the most basic responsibility we have as human beings. Many of us who have served in the Senate have children and grandchildren, and we would do anything to be able to promise to them that when they grow up, they will be able to follow their dreams and take a risk on themselves to achieve more than we ever could. Many of us remember just how hard our own parents worked to keep that promise to us. All of us, Democrat and Republican alike, want to be able to make that promise not just to our own children but to every child in America, no matter where they grow up or what their family life is like or what obstacles they may encounter along the way.

We all want a country where every child has the opportunity to fulfill his or her God-given potential. We all understand that whether we can provide every child with a great education is the most basic measure of whether we are keeping that promise. Fortunately, the HELP Committee, which I had the honor of serving on since I first arrived in the Senate, has been led by public servants who share those values and a common commitment to delivering on that promise. Under Chairman Harkin and now under Chairman ALEXANDER and Ranking Member MURRAY, the HELP Committee has often been able to be an example of how Democrats and Republicans can work together to make progress.

When I first got here, the debate was focused on No Child Left Behind, which Congress had passed and President Bush had signed into law in 2002. Democrats and Republicans worked together on that bill back then because they all believed that it was important that our schools be held accountable for the results they achieved on behalf of all students. But by 2009, it had become clear that No Child Left Behind simply wasn't getting the job done.

A couple of weeks after I got to the Senate, I held a roundtable with principals at a school that had been turned around in a poor neighborhood by a great principal in St. Paul. One of the other principals told me that he referred to the NCLB tests as autopsies. I knew exactly what he meant. The kids were taking the tests in late April. The results didn't come back until late June or later—too late to let the results inform teachers' instruction of each child.

In Minnesota, therefore, most school districts added computer adaptive tests