

who has not been doing the job. I have talked to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs who understands the problem and agrees this has to be fixed.

My bill will improve the scheduling process for veterans seeking healthcare. They shouldn't have to wait weeks or months to be able to get an appointment with a doctor.

Our military operates under the simple creed, "Leave no person behind," but far too many of our veterans in need of healthcare are languishing in a system that simply isn't accountable to them. Through this private contracting process, that certainly has been the case.

My bill would require the VA, and any outside contractors who are setting up healthcare appointments through the Veterans Choice Program, to provide veterans with more and better information, and if veterans are still struggling to get appointments, they will be told exactly how to file a complaint so it can get fixed.

Second, my legislation will hold third-party contractors accountable. We have excellent service through our VA medical facilities, but this new system—which is supposed to make it better, quicker, and faster—has not been working, and third-party contractors, at least in Michigan, have not been held accountable.

The VA will track all appointments made through outside contractors who must schedule appointments within 5 days. Any appointments not scheduled within 5 days will be sent to the VA for followup.

Within 30 days of this legislation being signed, third-party contractors will be required to submit a list of the veterans who have been waiting for more than 15 days for their appointments. I know of many waiting much longer. We don't leave soldiers on the battlefield. We shouldn't leave veterans to fight alone to get their healthcare needs met.

Third, this legislation ensures that Veterans Choice Program providers receive prompt payment or denial of payment. If payment is denied, the healthcare provider will need to be told why and what information they need to submit in order to get the claim processed.

The VA will also be required to submit a report to Congress on the number of unpaid claims to Veterans Choice Program providers and to take action on those claims within 45 days.

What do I mean by providers? I am talking about our hospitals in northern Michigan, in the Upper Peninsula, in the northwest side of the State, and the northeast side of the State signed up under this program to be able to provide the care for someone who is more than 40 miles away from a VA medical center; then, they find they are not getting paid for their services to the tune of millions and millions of dollars.

Veterans who have served their country and the medical providers who

treat them deserve nothing less than getting this system right. Appointments should be made quickly, payments should be made for service, and there has to be continual accountability. Unfortunately, we know they aren't always getting what they need.

One of those veterans is Jerry, a former National Guardsman who was stationed in Greenville, MI, on the west side of the State. He now lives in Sumner Township in Gratiot County.

Last January, Jerry received a scary diagnosis. He had a lesion on his brain. He needed to see a specialist right away. Veterans Choice was supposed to make an appointment for Jerry to see an endocrinologist, but when he showed up for the appointment, unbelievably, he discovered he was mistakenly sent to a urologist. After that, Veterans Choice sent Jerry to a family practitioner who had no record that he even had an appointment. It was 2 days off of work and travel to visit doctors that Jerry should have never been sent to in the first place.

By this time, Jerry was understandably very upset. He reached out to my office, and I am glad he did, so we could help. We were able to contact Veterans Choice on his behalf and get him the appointment he needed with the right specialist. Now, this is after his spending 5 months—5 months—trying to get to the right doctor. There is no excuse for this.

However, Jerry's issues weren't over. When he saw the same specialist a second time, Jerry learned the doctor had never been reimbursed for his previous visit. As Jerry said, "It shouldn't take five months to see a specialist, especially with something this scary and serious. And I shouldn't have to worry about whether or not Veterans Choice will pay for my care that I have earned."

Yes, Jerry, you have earned and been promised that care.

Jerry is exactly right. Unfortunately, he is not alone in Michigan—I know this from talking to colleagues in other areas—particularly with this same provider. I have heard from many other Michigan veterans who can't get appointments, are getting the wrong appointments, are having to travel long distances to appointments—which, this was supposed to stop veterans from having to drive long distances for appointments—or whose healthcare providers aren't being paid for their services and then deciding they don't want to participate in the Veterans Choice Program.

My colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee are working on comprehensive reforms to the Veterans Choice Program, and we are staring down another funding deadline. It is important this gets done, and we need to do it right away. We need to fix the problems veterans are having to deal with on a daily basis. I am looking forward to working with colleagues to fix this as quickly as possible. Our veterans deserve better. It is time we pass

this legislation and make sure they get it.

I would like to end with the words of a man who knew something about service and sacrifice on behalf of our country.

Before he was President, before he was a member of this very Chamber, John F. Kennedy was a veteran who served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. On August 2, 1943, the PT boat he commanded was struck by a Japanese destroyer in the South Pacific. The entire crew ended up in the water, and two of his men died. Although Lieutenant Kennedy badly injured his back in the collision, he helped his men find safety on an island several miles away, where they were rescued a week later. Kennedy later was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for his leadership. He once said: "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

I believe that is our responsibility. It is not enough to praise our veterans on special days, although they have certainly earned every word of praise. Instead, we must work together to uphold each and every promise we have made to them.

Veterans like Jerry and so many others have always been first in line to defend us. It is time to make sure they are not at the back of the line when it comes to getting the healthcare they need.

#### CHIP AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, on a different subject, talking about keeping promises; that is, other people who are counting on us to be able to act in order to get their healthcare.

We have had 81 days since the funding ended for the Children's Health Insurance Program and community health centers. Each State is a little different because of the various combinations of funding and so on, which meant not everyone lost care immediately right after. There are three States this month, others in the first of the year, and so on.

I literally received just a few moments ago a notice from our State saying it is very likely that if we don't act, in January, families in Michigan are going to get a notice that what we call MICHild, which provides healthcare for 100,000 children in Michigan of working families who don't qualify for help through Medicaid or other assistance—they are working and maybe at work they are getting healthcare, but it doesn't cover their children, or maybe they are not getting healthcare, and they want to at least be able to cover their children, that is what MICHild is all about.

It has been 81 days since the deadline of September 30, which stopped the Federal funding from going forward. This affects 9 million children nationwide and 100,000 children in Michigan.

In addition to that, community health centers across the country serve 25 million patients every year; 300,000 of them are veterans, and 7.5 million of them are children.

I had the opportunity last Friday to visit two wonderful facilities—one in Flint, which is in Genesee County, and one in western Wayne County—and see the great work they do and talk to some of the people who were there to get care. People are counting on community health centers and they are counting on the Children's Health Insurance Program in order to make sure they have the care they need for themselves and their families.

It is important that we act. We could act right now. This is bipartisan. We passed a bipartisan bill out of the Finance Committee in September, before the deadline. I want to thank the chairman, Senator HATCH, and the ranking member, Senator WYDEN. I was pleased to join with them. We passed it out of committee with only one "no" vote. We have bipartisan support to get this done. Senator BLUNT and I offered a bill that is bipartisan and has had the support of 70 Members of this body in signing a letter saying to continue funding for community health centers.

Our plan all along was to pass the children's health insurance bill out of committee in September and add health centers and then pass it before the deadline so that it would take away the anxiety, worry, and fear that families now have about what is going to happen.

Every day that goes by, people are worried about what is going to happen. Are they going to be able to take their child to the doctor, be able to get their asthma treatments, handle their juvenile diabetes, cancer treatments, or the normal things that happen to kids every day?

I am not sure if there will be any votes today. We could, today, pass the Children's Health Insurance Program and community health centers and let families across America know they are going to be able to have the medical care they need for themselves and their children coming into the new year.

I yield the floor.

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.

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

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

#### DACA

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to speak about an urgent crisis that Congress must solve now for nearly 800,000 Dreamers in this country. I am proud to represent New York State in the U.S. Senate. One of the things I am most proud of is that my State is home to tens of thousands of Dream-

ers—tens of thousands of young people who have never known any other country as home but this one.

When President Trump announced that he wanted to end the DACA Program, it was one of the most inhumane actions of his entire Presidency. Let me be clear about what ending DACA will do. Ending DACA will force thousands of Dreamers to lose their jobs. It will force them to go into hiding. It will force them to have to make the unimaginable choice between staying here undocumented or being forced out of the United States.

I ask my colleagues, are you really OK with letting that happen when you personally have the power to prevent it from happening right now? Attacking Dreamers like this goes against our most basic values as Americans, our most basic sense of right versus wrong.

I know this Chamber is divided about how to fix our broken immigration system, but just for a second, forget about ideology and think about what it actually means for these young people who have spent their entire lives here. They are waiting and wondering if Congress actually has the guts to stand up to President Trump and do what is right.

If the President will not lead, then Congress must lead, and we need to lead now. We have to protect our Dreamers, and we need to pass the Dream Act.

Most of all, we should never allow our Dreamers to be used as political pawns. We should simply do what both parties have said is the right thing to do, which is to pass the Dream Act. This is a matter of basic human rights and human dignity. It is about people's lives, and I am not going to compromise on that.

Mr. President, are you willing to compromise on that?

We need to fix this problem, and we don't have a lot of time to do it. Every week that Congress refuses to take action, more Dreamers lose their DACA status. Very soon, we are going to have to pass a long-term spending bill just to keep the government running, but the Republican leadership has not yet committed to including a provision in the bill to protect our Dreamers.

I want to say this very clearly: If my Republican colleagues refuse to do the right thing and protect our Dreamers in the upcoming long-term spending bill, I will vote no. I will ask my colleagues to join me in this fight. I will ask all of them to see that this issue is not a political question. It is a basic question of whether or not we are a country that protects children.

I am never going to compromise when it comes to our Dreamers, not when their lives are literally hanging in the balance. Time is desperately running out. I urge my colleagues to do what is right. We must protect the Dreamers.

I yield the floor.

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. ISAKSON. Mr. 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

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, it is a historic day for our country, for the Senate, and for the Congress.

As we speak, the President of the United States is about to sign the bill that we passed on the floor of the Senate last night, which was the agreement on the conference report—the largest tax reform in the history of our country or, certainly, the largest since 1986. It is historic in many other ways because we are fighting wars overseas, we are dealing with terrorism, and we are looking at the economic climate for the future and trying to inspire our country to be better and be everything that it can be. We are talking about all of those types of things, and we are getting ready for Christmas.

#### TRIBUTE TO JIM MCCOOL

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, we are busy about lots of things, but there is one thing that you should never be too busy to do, and that is to pause and stop and say thank you—thank you to someone or some entity or some institution that has made a difference in your life or in the life of your country.

I don't often come down here on points of personal privilege. I do it, but I don't often do it. When I do do it, it is special for me, and I hope it is special for the people I am talking about.

A good friend of mine is retiring from the Southern Company in the next few months. His name is Jim McCool.

Now, most of you probably don't know Jim McCool. Jim is one of those people who some people refer to as a lobbyist and others refer to as a professional advocate. I refer to him as my good friend. I met him in the 1980s. He had started his own formal wear business. He then sold that business and went to work for Mississippi Power. It was later one of the Southern Company's companies. He then worked as a liaison to Washington for the Southern Company, for Georgia Power, for Mississippi Power, and for Alabama Power.

I got to know Jim in lots of ways. First of all, it was when I was in the Georgia State Senate and the Georgia State House. On the industry committee, we worked on issues that dealt with electric utilities. I didn't know anything about those, as I was a real estate broker. My knowledge of electricity was that when I threw that switch, I wanted it to come on. Once it got beyond that, I didn't have knowledge of it.

Jim was one of those people who didn't just come and say: This is my company's position. We want you to do it. He asked: What is it about my company's position that I can help explain