

years. We were making progress. We were coming together around a legislative solution that would get rid of all this uncertainty and unpredictability and ambiguity and the clouds that hang over this issue and allow open internet rules to be put into place and allow the internet to continue to thrive and grow and innovate.

For decades, the commercial internet has been a source of innovation, economic growth, and opportunity, but that growth and opportunity will be stalled and stifled if we keep going the way we are going. We can't have internet regulations ping-ponging back and forth from administration to administration or from year to year, for that matter. That will bring innovation and investment to a standstill, and that is the worst possible thing you can do for those people across this country—many of whom I represent in South Dakota—who still don't have access to high-speed internet services. Nobody is going to be interested in taking risks or investing in innovation if they can't predict what the rules will look like a year down the road.

The only way to preserve the dynamism of the internet, while also protecting consumers, is for Democrats and Republicans to come together on legislation to provide long-term certainty. For that to happen, Democrats are going to have to rise to the occasion, and they are going to have to stop playing political games to score political points and start focusing on actually legislating, because you see this CRA, this Congressional Review Act resolution, is going nowhere. Yes, they might narrowly get a vote out of the Senate because we have a Senator missing here, but it is not going anywhere in the House, and it is not going to be signed into law by the President. All it does is prolong this debate we are having. We could settle this debate once and for all if we were willing to sit down and actually work on a legislative solution.

I hope that once the Democrats have gotten this latest political stunt out of their system, they will be willing to come to the table and develop a real solution that will allow the internet to flourish for generations to come.

The Democratic leader, who was just down here, said the question here is, Whose side are you on? Well, I think that is a good question to ask because the question is, Whose side are you on? I think the choice is, Are you on the side of Big Government and heavy-handed regulation that stifles investment in the internet, stifles innovation, or are you truly for a free and open internet, a free market where the internet continues to thrive and to grow and to provide so many opportunities for people around this country?

He said passing the CRA makes economic sense. Well, not if you want to get 5G, not if you want to provide high-speed internet services, not if you want to deploy broadband to rural areas in this country, because that takes in-

vestment. Investment follows certainty. They want to know what the rules are. They want the rules to be clear and unambiguous so that this can move forward, so that they can move forward and continue to see this economic miracle of the internet advance and continue to be taken advantage of and benefited by so many Americans.

We have a chance to do that. We really do. But we can't do it when we sit around and mess around with political theater and political stunts, which is precisely what this is, and everybody knows it. Our colleagues on the other side know it. I have talked to lots of them who say: We want to work with you on legislation, but, you know, right now, we have this CRA we are going to vote on—which is a shiny object, and everybody gets to shoot at it. People can go out and raise money, and they can get people fired up at the grassroots that this is somehow going to be some magic solution, but it is not. It doesn't do anything.

Even if it succeeded, what are you doing? You are just creating more back-and-forth from one FCC to the next. You are just requiring more money to be spent in courtrooms on litigation and lawsuits rather than invested in the types of technologies that will bring that high-speed access to more people in this country, that will get us to the fifth generation of technology, which is where everybody wants to go. Why don't we just sit down and do that? Why is this so hard? Well, it is because people think there are partisan political points that can be scored by doing this.

Remember one thing too: The Congressional Review Act resolution of disapproval was created by Congress to unwind or prevent harmful regulations from going into effect—that an administration might be putting into effect. It is a way for Congress to be heard from if, in fact, the Congress—the people's representatives—believes the administration is heading in the wrong direction when it comes to some regulation.

The CRA has never been used to regulate. That is what this is doing. The FCC is unwinding the heavyhanded regulation that went into effect in 2015, and this is going to attempt now to regulate, not to deregulate or prevent regulations from going into effect. That has never happened before. Do my colleagues on the other side honestly think that Republicans in the House of Representatives are going to vote for that or that President Trump will sign it into law? No. Everybody knows better than that.

So what are we doing? We are playing a silly game here at the expense of a real solution—a solution that is out there waiting for us if we will simply sit down, as we should as elected representatives, as Senators, on both sides of the aisle, and address an issue that is very important to our economy and very important to a lot of Americans. I hope we can do that. We are not going

to get there as long as we continue with this charade that we are taking on here today and in the weeks ahead.

It is time for clear rules. We want an open and free internet that investors can invest in—and people can benefit from that investment—and that provides opportunities and gains in productivity and continues the economic miracle that the internet has been for this country. That is what this debate is about, pure and simple. It is nothing else. We have a chance to do that, but we can't do it if we continue to play this sort of a game.

I hope my colleagues will at some point—maybe we will go through this, and maybe we will have this vote. If we do, maybe they will win. They might win by a one-vote margin. It is not going anywhere. We all know that. Let's get serious on behalf of the American people. If there are legitimate, serious concerns about potential abuses by internet service providers when it comes to throttling speeds or blocking lawful content or any of that sort of thing—paid prioritization—let's address that in law. Let's quit messing around. Let's get to work.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SUL-LIVAN). The Senator from Connecticut.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, this week people in Virginia and Maryland are waking up to the first rate filings by private insurance companies in 2018. The numbers are simply stunning.

I am coming to the floor today to talk about what is going to be a very unhappy spring and summer for healthcare consumers all across the country, as health insurance companies—having now dealt with a full year and a half of President Trump's sabotage of the American healthcare system—are going to be looking at gigantic, unaffordable premium hikes for private healthcare insurance.

I wanted to come down today, as we are starting to get into these rate filings, as our constituents are starting to ask why they are facing premium increases of, in some cases, up to 90 percent—think about that. Think about getting a notice from your insurance company telling you that in 1 year, your premium is going to double. The cost of getting health insurance is going to double. I feel it is time to come down and talk about why this is happening, why you are seeing these radical rate hikes being proposed from insurance companies.

I want to walk through, for my colleagues, this very deliberate campaign of sabotage that this administration and congressional Republicans have waged against the Affordable Care Act and the American healthcare system writ large.

It starts on January 20. Within hours of being inaugurated, President Trump issues an Executive order in which he directs all of his Federal agencies to use their administrative powers to begin dismantling the Affordable Care

Act “to the maximum extent permitted by law.”

This is before there is any proposal for what should substitute for a piece of legislation that insured 20 million people who didn’t have insurance before the Affordable Care Act. It was before we knew that replacement would, in fact, uninsure, not 20 million people but 30 million people and drive up rates by double digits.

On the first day, President Trump tells his agencies to start dismantling and attacking the Affordable Care Act. At this point, the Affordable Care Act is so wrapped into the healthcare system of this country that when attacking the Affordable Care Act, you are attacking the entirety of the healthcare system.

On January 26, 2017, the administration announces that it will stop advertising the open enrollment period for the Affordable Care Act. The administration says: We are no longer going to tell Americans that they have an option to become insured or to get less expensive coverage through the healthcare exchanges set up around the country or through the national exchange, leaving millions of Americans in the dark.

Next, the President starts to threaten insurance companies—threatening to pull the subsidies that Congress approved allowing for premiums to be reduced for lower income beneficiaries. The Trump administration starts threatening to pull those cost-sharing reduction payments in April of 2017. Eventually, in October of last year, the administration follows through on that threat and ends payments to insurance companies to help reduce cost-sharing for beneficiaries, driving up the cost of insurance all across the country.

If you listen to health insurance executives talk to you about why they are passing on these big premium increases, they will tell you that one of the biggest reasons is the end of this program to help defray the costs for lower income individuals. Also, in 2017, about the same time he starts threatening to reduce these payments, the President cuts in half the open enrollment period. There is no reason to cut in half the open enrollment period other than you just don’t want people to get insurance. It is a deliberate sabotage.

Cutting in half the enrollment period is simply a mechanism to try to deny people the ability to get healthcare. There is no practical or logistical benefit to reducing the amount of time people have to buy healthcare, just as there is no practical benefit to cutting off all the advertising for the healthcare exchanges other than you don’t want people to sign up.

In July of 2017, the Department of Health and Human Services starts to unveil videos—23 of them in all—featuring individuals explaining how the Affordable Care Act has hurt the American healthcare system. They used their Twitter account to amplify these

anti-ACA messages, and they removed any content promoting the exchanges from the website. Once again, it is just a spiteful attack on Americans who want to get health insurance and now will not know about it because of these attacks and removal of that content.

Open enrollment outreach funding was reduced in August of 2017 by as much as 90 percent. So the helpful people you used to have trying to figure out whether you qualified for Medicaid or whether you qualified for a subsidy or a tax credit are no longer available because that money was taken away.

Then there was the big legislative intervention, the repeal of the individual mandate. The individual mandate was repealed as part of the tax bill, even though CBO told Congress: If you do that, 13 million people will lose insurance. With full knowledge that the repeal of the mandate would result in 13 million Americans losing their health insurance, Congress went forward with it. CBO also said it will result in double-digit premium increases. Congress was told, if you take this step, 13 million will lose coverage, and premiums will go up. Congress still moved forward with it, and it was passed as part of the tax bill, with no Democratic votes.

Finally, the President most recently unveiled what he called the short-term health insurance plan rule. These are more commonly referred to as junk plans. These are plans that last up to a year but don’t need to comply with Federal regulations; for instance, regulations that require insurance companies to actually give you coverage for things like mental illness or maternity care or regulations that require insurance companies to protect people with preexisting conditions. All of those superpopular benefits in the Affordable Care Act—the ones the Republicans were so nervous to remove—are now no longer available to many Americans. Because of this short-term plan rule, these junk plans are going to be much more widely available.

So you have this very coordinated, very deliberate attack on the American healthcare system: the Executive order in January of 2017, directing all Federal agencies to start undermining the American healthcare system; in April of 2017, the cut in the open enrollment period; in May, the votes start happening on the floor of the Senate to take insurance away from 23 million people—one of the bills took away insurance from 30 million people; in December, the repeal of the individual mandate, resulting in premiums going up by double digits; and now this junk plan rule, taking away protections from millions of Americans. The effect of that junk plan rule is also to move healthier patients out of the exchange pools into the junk plans because the junk plans don’t have to cover anything, so healthy people will go to those plans, which drives up rates for the plans that people with any kind of preexisting condition would be able to access.

You have this very deliberate plan to try to undermine the American healthcare system, and we are now seeing the consequences. As I mentioned, the period of rate filings is beginning across the country, where insurance companies have to announce what their rate increases are going to be.

Healthcare inflation, on an annual basis, has been holding steady over the years. It certainly never gets above 10 percent, and for a number of years during the early rollout of the Affordable Care Act, that number was at or lower than 5 percent. So if you are just looking at the amount we are spending on an annual basis above last year on healthcare, that number has not recently been more than 5 percent. Yet one insurer in Virginia—a subsidiary of the big health insurance company, CareFirst—is proposing a 64-percent increase in Virginia. Other rate increase requests in Virginia are 26 percent and 15 percent. Nobody can afford a 64-percent increase in health insurance premiums in Virginia, but it is a consequence of this deliberate campaign of sabotage.

Let’s take a look at Maryland. There is one insurance company in Maryland that is asking for a 91-percent increase in premiums—again, this is a CareFirst plan—for its broad network PPO plan that currently has about 13,000 people in it. Thirteen thousand people in Maryland potentially are going to get a 91-percent increase in their health insurance premiums because of this deliberate campaign of sabotage.

If you are in other CareFirst plans in Maryland, you are getting a 19-percent increase. Your premiums are going up by one-fifth in one single year, in large part, because of this deliberate campaign to undermine the Affordable Care Act because of actions this Congress has taken that would knowingly increase rates for healthcare consumers.

My colleagues and I are going to come down to the floor of the Senate, over the course of the spring and summer, to make sure everyone here and every one out there in America understands what the consequences of this American healthcare sabotage campaign is. It starts in Maryland with rate increases that get as big as 91 percent, and in Virginia, where health insurance increases get as big as 64 percent. These numbers will continue to roll out all across the country, and Americans are going to be stunned—stunned—at how much this Republican campaign sabotage is costing them.

I will just add one last note, which, to many of my constituents in Connecticut, feels like insult to injury. The tax bill did drive up rates by 10 percent, at least, in the first year. A big chunk of these increases, more than 10 percent, is a result of the repeal of the individual mandate, but the tax bill also gave a windfall to insurance companies and drug companies—some of the biggest players in the healthcare space.

I just totaled up the projected 2018 tax savings to eight of the biggest insurance companies in the country, and it is over \$4 billion. At the same time that these companies are passing along rate increases of 64 percent or 90 percent, they are getting billions of dollars in tax savings from this Congress. It appears none of the tax breaks this Congress bestowed on the insurance industry is going to consumers.

When you look at the drug industry, where we have a little bit more mature information, you know why. One report, I believe released by the Finance Committee, showed that pharmaceutical companies already have announced \$50–50–billion in stock buybacks and share buybacks as a result of the tax bill. These drug companies aren't announcing price cuts to insurance companies; these drug companies are not announcing price cuts for consumers; these drug companies are announcing massive share and stock buybacks that will largely benefit the millionaire and billionaire investors in those drug companies. This is insult to injury for the people in my State and people all across the country because they are watching their healthcare insurance premiums skyrocket, while the windfall of the tax bill accrues to the owners of the insurance companies and the drug companies.

What a great time to be in the healthcare business today. You get a giant tax break, and you get to pass along gigantic premium increases to consumers all across this country.

Think about it. Somebody in Maryland, making \$30,000, \$40,000 a year and being told the insurance company he does business with is going to get \$1 billion in new tax relief from this Congress, and he is going to get a 91-percent increase in his premium. That is outrageous. That is outrageous, and yet it is just going to get worse.

As this spring and summer plays out—I think every single week there is a new State or set of States unveiling rate filings—I will come down and update this chart so everybody knows what the numbers are. It starts with rate increases as high—and I am not saying every single increase is this high, but in Virginia it is 64 percent, and in Maryland it is 91 percent. I have a feeling there are going to be a lot of very big numbers on this board, and I want to make sure everybody understands that if you want to know why premiums are going up at the rate they are, you don't have to look any further than this campaign of healthcare sabotage that has been waged by the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President pro tempore.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I listened carefully to the distinguished Senator, and I am going to come back to the floor and explain why he is wrong on every point. I am just really amazed that they make these arguments when

they are the ones who really caused the healthcare bill to come forth, which is just eating us alive, but I am here for another reason.

#### WELCOMING HOME AMERICANS HELD IN NORTH KOREA

I would like to open my remarks by joining the President and the American people in welcoming home three courageous individuals who have been held in captivity in North Korea.

We are all grateful for their safe return, but even as we celebrate their homecoming, we cannot forget about another brave American who has been unlawfully detained abroad—Joshua Holt.

For 2 years, Joshua and his wife Thamy have been held on spurious charges in a prison in Venezuela, and for 2 years I have been working hard to bring them home. Rest assured that I will continue to work closely with the administration to secure their release.

#### NOMINATION OF GINA HASPEL

Now, Mr. President, I would like to turn to another matter as President pro tempore of the U.S. Senate and as the longest serving Republican on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. I ask my colleagues to come together in voting to support Gina Haspel's nomination to serve as the next Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

I took to the floor just 2 weeks ago to speak on behalf of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. While I am delighted we were able to get behind his nomination, I am shocked and embarrassed by the scale of partisanship and enmity that marked his confirmation process.

On the day of Ms. Haspel's hearing, I am once again disappointed at how poorly a dedicated servant has been treated by the press and by some in this Chamber.

This is someone who has served her organization faithfully for over three decades. She is one, among a very small group, who rose up through the ranks within the Directorate of Operations during the Agency's transition from the Cold War to the War on Terror.

The job of the CIA operative—our Nation's first line of defense—is a thankless one. For generations, the American people will never know the length of the sacrifices these men and women make to keep us all safe. For these men and women, public service is not only a profession but a lifestyle—a commitment that often requires the sacrifice of family and loved ones as well. It is a life of constantly being on the frontlines, being in the arena in every sense of the expression.

Ms. Haspel embodies all these qualities and has given of herself in ways we can never imagine or begin to do ourselves. In turn, she has not only acquired the needed experience and expertise for this job but has also gained the respect of men and women of the organization she is to head.

She has also worked closely with Secretary Pompeo as his Deputy for

the year during which he was Director—a level of trust that would be critical in her new role as Director working with the Secretary of State.

It is worth pointing out to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle the words of praise offered for Ms. Haspel's nomination by security officials who served under President Obama.

James Clapper, the former Director of National Intelligence, said: "I think the world of Gina; she is capable, smart, very experienced, well respected by the Agency rank and file, and a great person."

Leon Panetta, who served as both CIA Director and Secretary of Defense, said: "I'm glad that they have a first woman as head of CIA, and I'm glad that it's Gina because frankly she is someone who really knows the CIA inside out."

John Brennan, who also served as President Obama's CIA Director, said: "She will be able to provide that unvarnished, apolitical, objective intelligence input to Donald Trump and to others."

If these words do not represent a seal of approval, then I don't know what does. Never have I seen someone receive such widespread praise from such a distinguished and bipartisan group of seasoned authorities, and never did I think I would live to see the day that the CIA would receive its first female Director.

I know we will all come together, ultimately, to vote to confirm Ms. Gina Haspel as Director of the CIA, but I would like to take this opportunity to again remind my colleagues in the Senate of the destructive nature of this partisanship. Two weeks ago, we were on the cusp of not having a Secretary of State all because we were more concerned with political loyalties.

Today we see the same dynamic in play. We are again divided along party lines and, once again, on a candidate who is supremely qualified to lead the organization for which she was nominated. This type of partisanship is unprecedented in our history, and it is destructive for our future. It represents a true national security threat of the highest order.

We can disagree about specific policies, we can have our political stakes, but let's keep those out of our first responsibility of serving the American people, whose physical well-being and safety should be our first priority. Who better understands this than Gina Haspel, a distinguished public servant who has kept our country safe during the most dangerous times in recent memory.

I ask my colleagues to stop with this dangerous behavior. Enough of the partisan games. We will be able to hold Ms. Haspel, as other Cabinet members, accountable for specific policies, as is our job, but let's get them into their jobs first. Our Nation needs them, and our Nation needs us to behave as the representatives and stewards of our democracy that we ought to be.