

August working on healthcare. Folks were already paying too much for healthcare in the form of premiums, out-of-pocket expenses, and the eye-popping costs of so many prescription drugs. Now all of those costs are going up because “the unified Republican government” has done little to bring down the high cost of healthcare, and what it has done has made the situation worse.

Again, President Trump has dropped the ball on healthcare, and the August recess is a time to recover and do something good. President Trump deliberately sowed uncertainty in the healthcare marketplace as a way to make a political point against ObamaCare, and then congressional Republicans repealed the coverage requirement in their tax bill. Health insurers from coast to coast cite the repeal of the coverage requirement as one of the major reasons they are increasing rates next year.

Just last night, a report issued by the Trump administration itself showed that Medicare is going insolvent faster than expected. What caused it? In part it is the Republican tax bill and “the repeal of the individual mandate, which increased the estimate of the number of uninsured, in turn leading to a large increase in uncompensated care payments.” Again, the tax bill led to Medicare being less solvent and running out of money sooner.

In short order, the Trump administration will make things worse. They will be offering junk insurance plans that will bring back the dark days when Americans with preexisting conditions faced higher premiums, denied care, and medical bankruptcy.

We now have a few extra weeks in August. What will be No. 1 on the American people’s list? It is not the things Leader MCCONNELL mentioned, falsely blaming Democrats when appropriations aren’t moving along well, and he brags about how many appointments he has made to the bench. No, the No. 1 thing Americans want is healthcare, and we Democrats will spend the August recess focusing on that issue and forcing our Republicans to either cast votes or deny votes on those important issues. It is a great opportunity not just for Democrats, not just for Republicans, but for America. We are going to do it. We already have an agenda ready to go, and we are going to push for votes on these measures in August.

One, we want to expand access to Medicare. Many of us Democrats in this caucus believe 55 should be the age when you can buy in. Loads of Americans support that.

Two, we want to increase tax breaks to help families afford the cost of healthcare.

Three, we want to create a national reinsurance program to lower premiums.

Four, we want to ensure that people with preexisting conditions don’t get denied and priced out of insurance due to an expansion of junk insurance.

Five, we want to lower the skyrocketing costs of drugs.

President Trump should stay in Washington.

No Mar-a-Lago, Mr. President, no golf all the time. You have taken so many vacations, while you criticize others.

It is typical—the double standard that he seems to exhibit every 10 minutes. President Trump should stay in Washington with us, roll up his sleeves, and get to work on making healthcare great again.

TRADE WITH CHINA

Now, Mr. President, on another matter, one that I talked to the Acting President pro tempore about this morning—our trade negotiations with China—as I said many times before, I am closer to President Trump on trade with China than I was to either President Obama or President Bush. I want our President to succeed in winning real concessions from the Chinese on longstanding issues, like intellectual property theft and market access. I believe that unlike previous Presidents, President Trump was serious about being tough on China to achieve our goals. But week after week, I keep reading reports that President Trump and his team are not being tough with China. They are conciliatory or accommodating, whether it is our national security or our economic security, where China is now eating our lunch.

Yesterday it was reported that the Trump administration would agree to relax penalties on the Chinese telecom giant ZTE. If the reports are true about a sweetheart deal for ZTE, President Trump has put China first, not America first. If these reports are true, once again, President Xi has outfoxed President Trump, the so-called deal maker.

ZTE has repeatedly violated U.S. sanctions and lied to U.S. officials about their efforts to rectify those violations. Their technology has been deemed a national security threat by the FCC, the FBI, and the Pentagon. Again, let me repeat that. Their technology is a national security threat, according to our defense and law enforcement authorities. Why on Earth is the Trump administration considering relaxing penalties on such a bad actor?

Some reports suggest that the Trump administration is forgiving ZTE to set up an exchange for a short-term, limited purchase of U.S. goods from China. If that is the case, what a terrible deal that is for America. Our No. 1 priority should be reducing the threat of intellectual property theft. Intellectual property theft not only threatens our short-term economic outlook, but it threatens our long-term leadership in high-tech industries, middle-class jobs of the future, and the security of our country.

To relax penalties on ZTE, a proven threat to American intellectual property, in a possible exchange for something as small as a one-time purchase of goods is like trading away your star

player for a last-round draft pick. By backing off and letting ZTE off the hook, China wins. If the reports are true, Congress should move in a bipartisan fashion to block this deal right away.

On top of the ZTE matter, there is no apparent path forward with the ongoing trade negotiations—nothing concerning intellectual property theft, nothing concerning market access, not even a framework. The two recent negotiations with China, led by Secretary Mnuchin and then by Secretary Ross, have failed to produce anything that is concrete, real, lasting, and important to America.

The administration keeps sending different officials with different priorities to lead discussions with China. Some are tough on China, and others are soft. Some have the President’s instincts in mind, and others do not. Secretary Mnuchin and Ambassador Lighthizer are in totally different camps. I am in the Lighthizer camp, but dissension is causing tremendous confusion and making our bargaining position so much weaker.

President Trump ought to direct our negotiators—all of our negotiators—to be tough with China and to stick with it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VA MISSION ACT

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I am proud that today President Trump will sign into law a piece of legislation that I fought for called the VA MISSION Act.

This important legislation will help fix many of the problems plaguing the VA Choice Program and will work to ensure that our Nation keeps the promises it has made to our veterans.

This bill is badly needed.

Take Hank, for example, a Montana veteran. Last year it took him more than 3 months to get an appointment and then another month to get the glasses he needed. It was clear to him that the Choice Program representatives were completely unaware of the distance issues that Montana veterans have to deal with.

And it is not just Hank. All across Montana, we have heard about how the VA Choice Program has consistently fallen short. It has missed the mark. Payment delays take up to 8 months. In fact, sometimes we have bill collectors coming after our veterans for something they should not be responsible for.

Veterans suffer hours-long waits to talk with representatives about claims, and veterans get the runaround on receiving the most basic services. This is unacceptable.

Our veterans deserve better. That is why the bipartisan MISSION Act is so vitally important. It helps fix many of the problems our veterans still face as they try to access the healthcare services they need.

Rural veterans will get greater, easier, and quicker access to healthcare. Telemedicine services will be strengthened. The oversight of opioid prescriptions will be increased. There will be greater accountability in how companies like Health Net manage this new program. Finally, it will help the VA's medical professional shortage through scholarship and loan repayment programs for medical and dental students who commit to serving in the VA.

The problems plaguing the VA aren't just occasional news stories; they are the daily reality for Montana veterans. Enough is enough.

Our Nation has a lot of work to do to fulfill the promises we have made to our veterans. The MISSION Act is an important step forward. I am proud I have helped get this bill across the finish line and on to President Trump's desk.

I look forward to honoring our veterans' service by standing with President Trump today as he signs this important bill into law.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SENATE SCHEDULE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday I announced that the Senate's regularly scheduled August recess will not occur this year. Members will be able to meet with our constituents during a standard 1-week State work period at the beginning of the month, and then we will come right back here and get back to work.

The reason is simple: We have too much left to do for the American people.

Sixteen months into the Trump administration, Senate Democrats persist in their unprecedented campaign to obstruct the President's nominees for a wide array of executive and judicial positions.

It is time for a little historic perspective.

During President Obama's first 2 years, the Senate needed only 12 cloture votes on nominations. In President George W. Bush's first 2 years, there were four cloture votes on nominations and for President Clinton, just eight. But less than a year and a half into this administration, the Democratic minority has stalled progress through—listen to this—101 cloture votes, and counting, on nominations—101 cloture votes.

This used to be a rare tool of last resort, used only in a tiny handful of cases. Well, not these days. In many cases, the nominees in question are completely without controversy. Not a single Senator in either party voted

against confirming Robert Wier or Fernando Rodriguez to serve as district court judges just yesterday. They were both confirmed unanimously. So were Walter Counts and Karen Scholer, two more district judges we considered back in January. But Senate Democrats forced us to invoke cloture on each of these nominees and then made sure they soaked up Senate floor time, even though literally no Senator opposed them.

This isn't due diligence. It certainly isn't good government. It is what happens when our friends across the aisle put political slogans about "the resistance" ahead of the country's needs.

We have gotten a great deal done this Congress. We have bolstered our economy with historic tax reform and regulatory reform. We have delivered critical resources to communities afflicted by the opioid crisis, with more on the way. We have undone harmful spending caps to fully equip our military. We have taken action to combat human trafficking and school violence. We have repealed ObamaCare's individual mandate tax and its Independent Payment Advisory Board and delayed several other healthcare taxes.

Republicans are still working to do more. We need to confirm more of the President's team and judicial nominees. We need to take up regular appropriations bills. We need to tackle legislative priorities like the water infrastructure bill, the farm bill, the Defense bill, and many others.

So the Senate will remain in session in August. We will work on legislation. We will confirm more nominees.

We will keep delivering on the agenda that has already done so much to make America stronger, safer, and more prosperous.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

On another matter, Mr. President, I was honored to meet a number of Kentucky veterans at the World War II Memorial and welcome them to Washington.

My father fought in World War II, so I was particularly grateful to hear these veterans' stories and share their special moments of remembrance. One man I talked to is 100 years old. He was in the initial invasion when we finally got on offense in North Africa. He fought in every theater in Europe and was there when the Germans surrendered on May 8, 1945. He landed at Omaha Beach, but he said it was 2 days after the invasion, so there was a second wave of soldiers coming in after the invasion, and there are stories and stories of people like that.

I had a chance to thank each of them, as well as the Honor Flight Bluegrass organization, which takes on the logistical and financial burdens so that veterans can travel to their monuments at no personal cost.

I was especially glad this opportunity came today, on the 74th anniversary of the D-day invasion. On June 6, 1944, the free world embarked on a daring mission of historic proportions. With con-

viction, bravery, and patriotism, the "greatest generation" ran into the breach.

Many paid the ultimate price on D-day, but their bravery paved the road to victory in Europe. Allied troops stared down the most pernicious evil the modern world had ever seen—and prevailed.

The world has changed in the years since D-day, but some things haven't changed at all. We still honor the sacrifices of those who ran into the breach.

Today, the President will sign into law the VA MISSION Act that Congress passed last month. It is a set of major improvements in the way we care for American veterans—increasing their choices and expanding access to care for those who sacrificed to serve.

Here is something else that hasn't changed: We still call on brave men and women to take on a wide array of difficult missions.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. President, soon the Senate will take up the John S. McCain 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. It is the result of months of serious bipartisan work by the Armed Services Committee, and it is a major step toward delivering the resources our men and women in uniform need to tackle the challenges of today—challenges like an emboldened Iran, the destabilizing force it abets in the Middle East; challenges like the expanding capabilities of Russia and China in this era of renewed great power competition.

This moment requires that we support our All-Volunteer Armed Forces with the tools, training, equipment, and resources they need to support our allies, to defend the homeland, and secure the peace. Secretary Mattis's new national defense strategy spells out what our Nation must do.

Our landmark budget agreement this year set aside the funds to put that plan into action, and now, with this NDAA, Congress will take the next step toward getting those resources where they need to be. Its authorizations include quality-of-life improvements for servicemembers and their families, land, sea, and air weapons systems, and reforms to the acquisitions process to keep America's military on the cutting edge.

With bipartisan action on the NDAA, the Senate will ensure that the next generation of American warfighters is every bit as ready as the "greatest generation" to write a new chapter of courageous service.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.