

As we all know, the opioid epidemic is a nationwide crisis, with some 63,000 Americans having been killed by drug overdoses in 2016. New Hampshire has been especially hard hit. The demise of the Affordable Care Act, which Mr. Azar says he wants, would mean that thousands of Granite Staters would lose access to treatment, with there being devastating consequences. That is true not just in New Hampshire but in States across this country. I think it is unconscionable that a Secretary of Health and Human Services would take away one of our most valuable tools for combating substance use disorders and that he would actively oppose access to healthcare for millions of Americans.

For me, between Mr. Azar's coziness with the pharmaceutical industry and his disdain for the Affordable Care Act, which is the law of the land and which Mr. Azar would be charged with administering as Secretary, I think he is the wrong person to serve in the critically important post of Secretary of Health and Human Services. I intend to vote against his confirmation, and I hope my colleagues will do the same.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President pro tempore.

(The remarks of Mr. HATCH and Mr. ALEXANDER pertaining to the introduction of S. 2334 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, earlier this week, the Senate voted to pass a continuing resolution to reopen the government. This came after weeks of acrimony and no shortage of hostility here on the Senate floor and elsewhere. While most of the recent debate has been focused on the future of immigration policy, another vitally important priority—and a bipartisan priority, no less—was also addressed this week.

I am talking, of course, about the 6-year extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program, which was included in the funding bill. It is a shame, really, that this bipartisan accomplishment has, in some respects, been overlooked while more attention has been given to partisan squabbling over other divisive issues.

Since its inception, CHIP has been a bipartisan program. In 1997, Senator KENNEDY and I came together to create CHIP in order to provide health insurance to vulnerable children. It was a Republican-controlled Congress working with a Democratic President that brought this program into existence.

The year before, that same Republican Congress and Democratic President worked together to produce another landmark welfare reform bill that sought to replace a culture of dependency with an emphasis on work. S-CHIP became a necessity for those families making the transition.

Prior to the introduction of the original CHIP bill, I came across a number of families with parents who worked

but still could not afford private coverage for their children. Yet they made too much to qualify for Medicaid. Senator KENNEDY and I designed our bill to fill this gap and meet those needs.

Today, the CHIP program provides health insurance for about 9 million needy children every year. While the program isn't perfectly designed—though few programs are—it is widely considered to be one of the most efficient and cost-effective healthcare programs. For that reason, Members from both parties have been supportive of the program since the day it was signed into law.

Last year, with an extension deadline approaching, Senator WYDEN, the ranking member of the Finance Committee, and I went to work on drafting another bipartisan CHIP bill, one that would make needed improvements to the program and extend it for an additional 5 years. We were successful. We introduced our bill in September and, shortly thereafter, the Finance Committee marked it up and reported it by voice vote.

We have been working to pass our bill since last September, and, thankfully, that time came earlier this week. When we voted to pass the CR, we also voted to successfully extend CHIP for 6 years. That is the longest CHIP extension in the history of this program.

Other than that extra year of funding, the bill we passed was identical to the one Senator WYDEN and I introduced last year. I know we have colleagues already talking about adding additional years, and I know a number of stakeholders would like to see that as well. I am definitely open to having a conversation with my colleagues on how we might move forward to support an additional 4 years of funding for CHIP.

In my view, if we can work together to pass a bill adding 4 years to the 6 already in place, that would be simply fantastic, but for this moment, let us not overlook the success we have achieved this week. A 6-year CHIP extension gives security and certainty to millions of American families and allows States to plan their budgets for several years into the future. That is a big deal. Let us keep that in mind as we look for ways to do more.

I would like to thank Senator WYDEN, my partner on the Finance Committee, for his efforts in developing this legislation. I would like to thank other members of the Senate Finance Committee who supported us all the way. Thank you to our distinguished majority leader and his team, as well as the leaders in the House who worked alongside us. I also thank the stakeholders across the country—the Governors, care providers, and of course the families who depend on CHIP for making their voices heard throughout this endeavor. I look forward to working with all of you going forward so we can make sure we do right by the children who benefit from CHIP.

Now, Mr. President, I would like to turn to a related issue in the healthcare space. The Senate will soon vote on President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services. I can think of very few others—and I have only been here 42 years—but I can think of very few others as qualified to take the helm of this very large ship than Mr. Alex Azar.

As Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mr. Azar would be responsible for trillions of dollars in spending, liabilities, and contracts that make up the backbone of our healthcare system.

What is more, Health and Human Services is still in the process of off-ramping many of the poor decisions made throughout the 8 years of the Obama administration. Unfortunately, many of those policies, regulations, procedures, and practices remain in place, continuing to undermine the sustainability of programs like Medicare and Medicaid, and artificially propping up the so-called Affordable Care Act.

The good news is, Mr. Azar brings with him nearly two decades of experience in the healthcare system, working in both the private and public sectors. Mr. Azar spent several years as a senior official at Health and Human Services, holding key positions overseeing Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage. He also led Health and Human Service's responses to the anthrax victims shortly after 9/11, the SARS and monkeypox crises, Hurricane Katrina, and many others.

Clearly, Mr. Azar has seen both the good and the bad at Health and Human Services and knows how to manage them. I don't think there is anyone here, even on the other side of the aisle, who would contest that. In fact, in the past, Mr. Azar has actually been confirmed twice. With experience both on the company side and the government side of healthcare, he is now only more experienced and knowledgeable.

I think the broad exercise will serve him well, particularly at this critical time when the Health and Human Services Secretary will need to be intensely focused on the opioid epidemic and other major problems facing our country. No doubt all of these are reasons why we reported Mr. Azar out of the Finance Committee with a bipartisan vote. If we set aside the partisan and the preconceived notions some have about certain industries, Mr. Azar would likely get a near-unanimous vote.

I hope at least some of our Democratic colleagues will vote to confirm him. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in doing so.

I yield the floor.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, today the Senate will vote on the nomination of Alex Azar, President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services. I join many of my colleagues in expressing concerns about this nominee.

First, I believe Mr. Azar will accelerate the Trump administration and

congressional Republicans' harmful agenda on Medicaid, which I view as nothing less than a war on Medicaid.

Medicaid is a lifeline for millions of Americans and a smart healthcare and economic strategy for our country. Last year, I spent hours on the Senate floor presenting data and information to my colleagues showing why cutting and capping Medicaid is a very bad idea. I met with Medicaid patients, safety net hospitals, community health centers, and local elected officials in every corner of my State. They had a crystal-clear message for me: Cutting and capping Medicaid will be bad for patients, bad for the healthcare delivery system, bad for local economies, and bad for our State. They expressed a consensus view that capping Medicaid is not healthcare reform, nor is it innovation; it is simply a budget mechanism to throw people off of healthcare.

Mr. Azar has stated that he favors a block grant or per-capita cap financing approach for Medicaid. He speaks highly of the current Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, CMS, Administrator and their troubling regulatory agenda for Medicaid. Mr. Azar has been a cheerleader for the partisan legislation we debated last year that would permanently eviscerate Medicaid. These bills, depending on each iteration, would take Medicaid coverage from 14 million Americans, sunset the successful Medicaid expansion, and eliminate up to one-third of Federal Medicaid investment over the next two decades, according to the Congressional Budget Office. I have every reason to believe that Mr. Azar would continue and accelerate the Trump administration's war on Medicaid.

Second, I have no evidence to suggest that Mr. Azar will stop the Trump administration's track record of throwing needless chaos into the individual health insurance markets.

There is bipartisan agreement that we need to make health insurance more affordable, particularly in the individual market, where about 7 percent of Americans buy coverage; yet the Trump administration has rejected bipartisan consensus and moved us backwards. This administration has proposed to unleash "junk insurance" under the guise of association health plans, cancelled cost-sharing reduction payments, created roadblocks to insurance enrollment, and pursued backdoor schemes to rescind protections for people with preexisting conditions. I have every indication that Mr. Azar will continue this trajectory of higher costs, less coverage, and more uncertainty.

I believe we can and must tackle rising healthcare costs by innovating in the delivery of healthcare, instead of simply capping programs and kicking people off coverage. To that end, I hope that Mr. Azar will advance true delivery system change in the Medicare Program, as he says he wants to, and engage with Senators of both parties to work on good ideas to bring more value

and efficiency to our healthcare system.

For these reasons, I will oppose Mr. Azar's confirmation to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIVE WORK

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I come to the floor today to talk about the Judiciary Committee, which I chair, about our important oversight work, the investigative work, and to kind of concentrate on the past year.

There are a lot of issues that need more sunlight and more scrutiny. One of my key concerns is the loss of faith in the ability of the Justice Department and the FBI to do their jobs free of partisan political bias.

The American people are rightfully skeptical because of how the Department and the FBI have handled the following subjects: on one hand, Hillary Clinton, and on the second hand, Donald Trump and his associates. Hiding from tough questions about these controversial cases is no way to reassure the public. If the Department is afraid of independent oversight, that just reinforces people's suspicion and skepticism. The only real way to reassure people is to let the sunshine in and let the chips fall where they may. In each of these cases, the government should obviously find out what happened and hold people accountable if there was any wrongdoing, but it also has to play by the rules and be held accountable for its actions as well. We need to shine the light of day on all of it.

As part of our investigation, we have requested documents and other information from the Department of Justice and the FBI. Much of that information is classified. The Department has provided very limited access to those classified materials. It has limited the Judiciary Committee's review to the chair, this Senator; the ranking member of the full committee, and that would be Senator FEINSTEIN; and the Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism, and that would be Senator GRAHAM and Senator WHITEHOUSE. The government has also tried to severely limit the number of appropriately cleared staff who can review documents and even take notes.

We have reviewed some information related to whether the FBI used a so-called Trump dossier and the extent of its relationship with its author, Christopher Steele. As we know now, Mr. Steele was hired by Fusion GPS to research Mr. Trump's alleged ties to Russia. His work was funded by the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign. Now, remember, it

took a subpoena and a court battle with the House Intelligence Committee to force that fact out into the open. Lawyers for the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign officials denied it to the press for months. In other words, they lied. The founder of Fusion GPS denied that his firm was "democratically linked." That, too, was untrue.

When the news finally broke, New York Times reporters actually complained that people who knew better had flat-out lied to them about who funded Mr. Steele's dossier. But back before the 2016 election, it is unclear who knew that Steele was gathering dirt on Trump for the Democratic National Committee and for the Clinton campaign. Many of his sources for claims about the Trump campaign are Russian Government officials. So Steele, who was working for Fusion GPS, who in turn was working for the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign, was also working with the Russians. So who was actually colluding with Russians? It is becoming more clear.

Mr. Steele shared his at least partially Russian-based allegations far and wide. He shared them with the FBI. He shared them with the media. According to public reports, he shared them with high-ranking officials in the Justice Department and the State Department.

In the course of our review, Senator GRAHAM of South Carolina and I came across some information that just does not add up. We saw Mr. Steele swearing one thing in a public libel suit against him in London, England, and then we saw contradictory things in documents that I am not going to talk about in an open setting here. I know everybody understands that. From everything we have learned so far, Senator GRAHAM and I believe these discrepancies are significant. So we sent a referral of Christopher Steele to the Justice Department and the FBI for potential violations of 18 U.S.C. 1001.

I guess people are going to say whatever they want to say about this whole matter no matter what the facts are, but it doesn't contribute anything meaningful to the public debate to ignore those facts or to speculate wrongly about Senator GRAHAM's motivations, or mine.

First, despite all the hubbub, this is not all that unusual. Anyone can ask for a criminal investigation. I have done it in the past when I have come across potential crimes in the course of my oversight work, and I have done so publicly. This situation is no different.

Second, as the special counsel has reminded us all recently, lying to Federal officials is a crime. It doesn't matter who is doing the lying, politics should have nothing to do with it.

I have said repeatedly that I support Mr. Mueller's work and I respect his role. I still do. Nothing has changed. I think it ought to be said again in case anyone missed it. The special counsel