

both parties need to scrutinize what Judge Kavanaugh has said because, if he is the swing vote on any kind of rational check on this President, I worry. We should all worry.

Conservatism has always believed in small aggregations of power so that the individual would have more freedom. That is the core of conservatism. Yet, when conservatives embrace Donald Trump, who wishes to aggregate power and roll over any checks to his power and now chooses to get behind Judge Kavanaugh, who seems to have an almost monarchical view of Presidential power, we have trouble. We had better be awfully careful here in this country. The Senate is going to have to look at each and every one of these issues in due time.

Today, however, I want to focus on the issue that might have the most profound consequences for the average American most immediately—healthcare and the protections for Americans who have preexisting conditions. In a few minutes, I will be joined by some of my colleagues over in the Mansfield Room to discuss this issue at length. Right now, though, here is what I would like to say.

Prior to Judge Kavanaugh's selection, President Trump promised to nominate a judge who "would do the right thing, unlike Judge Roberts on health care." Those are Trump's words.

He commissioned a list of judges from the Heritage Foundation—a far-right special interest group that is dedicated to dismantling government, including and especially the healthcare law. It is the place where the government spends a lot of money. These rich people who are behind the Heritage Foundation—the Kochs and others—don't want to pay any taxes. Those poor folks. They are struggling. Where do more taxes go than any other place? They go to healthcare. Why? Because that is what the American people want. Who wouldn't give everything they have if their spouse, their children, their relatives were sick and needed a lot of money to be cured?

That is why we have insurance, and that is why we have the government involved with things like Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid, but the Heritage Foundation—a handful of rich people who fund them and the so many Republicans who dance to their tune—don't want that. They hide it from the American people because the American people don't agree with it, but they don't want it. They have pushed forward Judge Kavanaugh to be the torchbearer on the Court for their mission.

The list of 25 that President Trump selected from was vetted and approved by this very Heritage Foundation. The Heritage Foundation would not give its stamp of approval to anyone who would maintain or grow our healthcare law, particularly protections for Americans with preexisting conditions.

The American people deserve to know where Judge Kavanaugh stands.

This is a serious issue. This is not something we can allow a nominee to hide behind and say: I will follow existing law. We need to know their view of the government's ability to be involved in people's healthcare; to help it be funded when the average person can't afford it, given how high the costs are.

Right now, several cases that challenge the structure and constitutionality of the law are wending through our courts. If one or many reach the Supreme Court, I will say to my fellow Americans, your right to be protected if, God forbid, someone in your family is sick is at risk. Your right to have an insurance company not cut you off if, God forbid, someone in your family is sick is at risk if Judge Kavanaugh ascends to the Bench. That is probably the No. 1 reason he is opposed by so many of us on this side of the aisle.

Can you imagine a Supreme Court thrusting us back to a time when you could be denied health insurance precisely because you needed it so desperately, to a time when a mother with a child who has cancer is made to watch her daughter suffer in agony because they can't get affordable healthcare because no insurer will insure someone who has a child with cancer in their family? Do we want to go back to that? Come on. This is not Democrat or Republican; this is what America believes in. The hard right, through subterfuge and, to their credit, long-term diligence, is getting these people on the Court. They could never pass such a law in the Congress, the elected body of the people, even with the Republican majorities, but the Court, the unelected branch, is where they are headed, and that is why we have to be so vigilant.

Up to 130 million nonelderly Americans have a preexisting condition—more than one-third of Americans. For insurance companies, it used to be the case that a condition as commonplace as asthma was justification for jacking up rates to unaffordable levels. The law we wrote to prevent those despicable abuses by insurance companies is potentially on the chopping block, in my view, and likely to go if Judge Kavanaugh becomes Justice Kavanaugh. How can we afford that?

The American people should have their eyes wide open to the stakes. The Supreme Court may very well hear a challenge to the legal protections for people with preexisting conditions, and President Trump's own Justice Department is currently arguing in court that those protections are unconstitutional. I would like President Trump, at one of his rallies, to tell the people at the rally he is for taking away their protections when they have someone with a preexisting condition in their family. He wouldn't dare, but that is what his legal departments in HHS and Justice are doing.

The President doesn't tell people what he is doing. He brings these hard-right people in and says: I am with

you. He whispers: I am with you. He doesn't dare tell the American people.

That is why it is our job in the minority, since the Republican side, by and large, has shown so little spine on this issue—it is our job to let the American people know the peril they are in, that their healthcare is in.

If anyone doesn't believe that President Trump is still intent on tearing down our healthcare system, just look at what the administration did yesterday. The President decimated funding that helps people sign up for health insurance, cutting it to one-sixth of what it was 2 years ago. This funding is used to help people navigate the complex landscape of health insurance and select the plan or program that is right for their family. Even worse, of the little funding that remains, Trump mandated that it be used to direct people into his junk insurance plans that don't cover basic essential healthcare. Yesterday's news should remind us that President Trump remains ruthlessly committed to tearing down our healthcare system. He will not admit it at his rallies. He does not dare talk about it, but that probably is the most important thing he is doing in terms of effect on the American people, and we are not going to let him hide it. Anyone who thinks President Trump did not make this Supreme Court nomination without an end goal of furthering healthcare sabotage is kidding themselves.

So while there are many rights and freedoms at stake on the Supreme Court, the right of all Americans to be able to afford healthcare is at the very top of the list. The selection process for Judge Kavanaugh and President Trump's own words should motivate Americans from all corners of the country to contact their Senators and urge them to oppose this nominee.

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. TILLIS. 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.

CALLING FOR THE RELEASE OF PASTOR ANDREW BRUNSON

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I come here in fulfillment of a promise that I made a couple of months ago to bring to the attention of the American people an injustice that is occurring in Turkey.

I am here to talk about an American pastor, Andrew Brunson. He is from a church. He is from western North Carolina. He spent 20 years in Turkey as a missionary. He started out just doing missionary work without a church. Then he built a very small church that maybe can house 100 people, in Izmir.

After the coup in 2016, Pastor Brunson was apprehended, and he has

been in prison ever since. He was imprisoned for almost 19 months without any charges. For the vast majority of that time, he was in a cell designed for 8 people that had 21 in it, without charges. Earlier this year there were charges levied against him that are just absolutely absurd. I know from firsthand experience.

After the indictment was issued, I heard through channels and through his wife Norine that Pastor Brunson was afraid that the American people were going to read this indictment, believe it, and turn their backs on him. So it was important for me to go to Turkey and let him know that is the last thing we are going to do and that I was going to bring this to the American people's attention until he was released.

I went back about a month later. I sat through a court proceeding in a Turkish courtroom for about 12 hours, and I heard some of the most absurd claims you can possibly imagine. They were charges that would not keep an American citizen or a foreign national in an American jail for the afternoon. Yet they have kept him in prison for 642 days.

This afternoon I am going to be traveling to Brussels to be a part of the NATO meeting that we have. I am going to seek to speak once again with the Turkish officials to tell them that justice needs to be served. Pastor Brunson needs to come home.

Pastor Brunson has a court date next week. It could be the last hearing, and he could be subject to a 35-year sentence. He is a little over 50 years old. So that is effectively a life sentence.

The charges are basically this. He has been a missionary. He has been providing humanitarian relief to Syrian refugees, to the Turkish people, and actually just offering and preaching the Word to those who want to hear it.

So I ask President Erdogan and the Turkish officials to please let justice be served. Let Andrew Brunson come home.

The last thing we are working on—and I hope it no longer has to be a provision in the NDAA—is that if he doesn't get released, we have to rethink our relationship with this NATO ally that has been in the NATO alliance since 1952. We have to ask ourselves about ramifications if a NATO ally will hold people illegally, imprison them, sweep them up—in a legitimate effort to tamp down an illegal coup—and hold this man hostage.

I hope I come to the floor in a couple of weeks thanking the Turkish Government, the Turkish people, and the Turkish judiciary for having justice served. The only way I believe justice will be served is when Andrew Brunson comes home. Until he does, I will come back here every week to continue to bring attention to this issue. It should be important to every American.

If any American is traveling to Turkey, right now I am not sure I would

because you could have a meal, you could have a light on for a couple of hours in your hotel room. These are the types of charges that have been used as a basis for saying that this man was conspiring to plot a coup and was conspiring to support terrorist organizations—eating a meal that looks like a meal that certain terrorist organizations like, which, incidentally, is a very popular meal in the Middle East; having a light on upstairs, in a room, incidentally, that doesn't have windows that some secret witness said could only be on because they were plotting some nefarious activity.

I thank the Members of this body—some 70 Members—who signed on to a letter expressing their concern with his illegal detention. I promise Pastor Brunson and I promise any American citizen and some of those Turkish citizens who work with the State Department that as long as I am a Senator, I will be bringing attention to this injustice until justice is served.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

Mr. President, I wish to very quickly bring attention to something about which I think people need to speak up on the other side of the issue; that is, this movement now called End ICE, or Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

We have a gubernatorial candidate in New York who said ICE is a terrorist organization—not ISIS, which is a terrorist organization, but ICE. These men and women in uniform go out every day and put their lives on the line to protect the American people.

Let me tell my colleagues what people who are part of the End ICE movement are for. This chart represents what they are for if they are for ending ICE. These are 2017 numbers. They are for ending the arrest of some 143,000 people who have broken our laws. They are for ending the seizure of tons of fentanyl.

I will give you an idea of what that means in terms of potential risk of human life. You are talking about gangs—some 5,000 gang members who were arrested last year because they were clearly related to gang activity, with MS-13 being one of the first among them. They are for ending all of our protections and having all of these activities go unchallenged on American soil.

If you are for ending ICE, you are for ending almost 7,000 pounds of heroin seized, and that is only a fraction of what these criminal elements are bringing to this country.

If Members come to this floor and talk about fighting the opioid epidemic, I can't imagine anyone who is sincere about fighting the opioid epidemic saying that they want more poison on the streets. You can't have it both ways. You are either for solving the problem of the opioid epidemic, which means that we have to have law enforcement to specialize in seizing it, or you are against it. You are for poisoning our youth. You are for poi-

soning people who are addicted to opioids. You can't have it both ways. If you want to end ICE, you are for this.

If you want to end ICE, you are for people who have tattoos that clearly indicate that they are part of a gang on the streets. We have gangs that, actually, as a part of getting initiated, want you to kill or harm somebody to prove that you will when you are asked to. If you want to end ICE, you are for more of these folks on the streets—some 4,800 of them.

Again, if you want to end ICE, then you want to end the careers of people who have such a dangerous job that, oftentimes, when they do drug seizures, they have to wear HAZMAT suits because if they touch the fentanyl, they could die or go into an overdose. If you want to end ICE, you want that poison to be in the hands of a child or someone else who, if they touch it, is going to die or have a profound overdose.

That is what ending ICE means. Just to sum up, if you want to end ICE, you want that seizure of a ton of fentanyl coming across our border, mainly from Mexico, that has enough potency to kill 500 million people.

Now, I honestly believe that nobody in this body really means that they want to end ICE, that they want to cause human traffickers, gun traffickers, drug traffickers—more of them. But you can't have it both ways. If you want to go on the stump and say you want to end ICE, then add this to your stump speech. Add this to the logical consequence of what happens when you insult the men and women in uniform in ICE and you say you want to end what they are doing, because if you do, the negative consequences are clear. All you have to do is look at what ICE has done over the last year, and what they would not do this year, if you really believe what they say about ending ICE.

So I think they need to ice the "end ICE" narrative and start getting smart about making sure that we maybe make changes that we need to in any organization. But for people to go to such an extreme, to say that they want to end one of the most important law enforcement agencies combating illegal immigration and illegal trafficking across our border, you had better be honest on the stump. You had better let them know what you mean because that is what they mean.

I think it is important for our Members to step up and let people know the consequences of this ridiculous rhetoric and to show the men and women in uniform—police officers, ICE agents, and everybody else—that people like me care about them. People like me respect them for what they do.

We know that their assaults were up by three times last year. It is a dangerous job. Many of them don't even know if they are going to come home when they leave in the morning.

It is an insult for anybody in this body to come into this Chamber and say that they need to be ended. They