

Senate Republicans are working with the President and his homeland security team on \$5.02 billion of targeted funding to bolster security measures in specific places where the Department of Homeland Security determines it is most needed. And make no mistake—the need is great. In fiscal year 2018, Customs and Border Patrol reported a 30-percent increase in apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico border. Looking further back, the monthly apprehension total this past October reached its highest level in 4 years—4 years. CBP has observed over the past year a 50-percent increase in apprehensions of known gang members and a 115-percent increase in seizures of fentanyl narcotics.

Clearly, delivering border security funding must be a priority. That is because the men and women of the Border Patrol deserve to be a priority. American communities deserve to be a priority as they face down the threat of gang violence. American families deserve to be a priority as the flow of lethal drugs fuels an epidemic of addiction.

This is the right investment in the right place at the right time. There is no reason why the Democratic leader and the House Democratic leader should put the demands of far-left special interests ahead of the safety of American families. There is no reason for my Democratic friends to end this year the way they began it—with a government shutdown. It would be truly bizarre for them to decide they would prefer a partial government shutdown to reasonable funding for national security. It would signal that their party is more committed to political spite for the President than to the public interest.

I will be watching eagerly this morning to see if the Democratic leaders approach these negotiations with the productive and good-faith spirit they deserve.

LEGALIZING HEMP

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, as I mentioned a moment ago, one key piece of our unfinished business is the farm bill. Last night, I used my very own hemp pen to sign the conference report, clearing the way for the House and Senate to pass legislation and send it to the President's desk. I am proud that the bill includes my provision to legalize the production of industrial hemp. It is a victory for farmers and consumers throughout our country.

Fighting for Kentucky hemp has been a long struggle. My State was once the national leader in the growing and production of industrial hemp, but then, for decades, a Federal ban halted that progress and shut American farmers out of the hemp field. Don't get me wrong—Hemp could still be found all over our country in all kinds of products. The problem is that it is all being grown somewhere else and imported

into America. It is time to let American growers get back in business with this versatile crop once again.

The farmers, processors, and manufacturers in my State and across the country are ready for the hemp comeback. It began in 2014 when I secured the establishment of a hemp pilot program with the help of then-agricultural commissioner Jamie Comer. States like Kentucky got the chance to explore the plant's potential and show us just what hemp could do, and the results have been nothing short of extraordinary. Now, American-grown hemp can be found in your food, your clothes, and even in your car dashboard. The results mean jobs, economic growth, and new opportunity. Last year alone, hemp products contributed more than \$16 million to Kentucky's economy, and that was just from the pilot program—just from the pilot program.

At a time when farm income is down and our growers are struggling, industrial hemp is a bright spot of agriculture's future.

My provision in the farm bill will not only legalize domestic hemp, but it will also allow State departments of agriculture to be responsible for its oversight. In Kentucky, that means that Commissioner Ryan Quarles—another champion of hemp—will be able to help farmers thrive. And I know the occupant of the Chair is familiar with Commissioner Quarles.

When the Senate votes on this legislation in the coming days, we will also be voting to give farmers throughout the country the chance to tap into hemp's potential and take part in its future. I have been proud to work with my colleagues in Congress, such as Senator RON WYDEN, and with hemp advocates in Kentucky to get to this point. Obviously, I will be proudly voting for this bill.

PRIVACY REFORM

Madam President, now on a final matter, the Senate will soon vote on an attempt by some of our Democratic colleagues to unwind an important privacy reform the Treasury Department enacted earlier this year.

We need to stand up for privacy, stand up for the First Amendment, and reject the Democrats' resolution.

The question at hand is whether the IRS should have special power to demand that certain nonprofit organizations hand over the list of their contributors.

This raises the question: Why should the IRS have this private information? Is it for accounting purposes? No. The regulation requires tax-exempt nonprofits to maintain books, but individual donations are not tax deductible so there aren't accounting reasons why the IRS would need to track donors.

Is it for transparency purposes? No. The personal information in question is not part of any public inspection requirement. In fact, the IRS is required

to redact this information when releasing a nonprofit's public tax filings. The guidance does nothing to affect the information that is publicly available.

So why does the IRS need to stockpile this information? For safekeeping? Hardly.

Several years ago, the IRS had to settle a lawsuit. A worker broke the law and leaked an unredacted copy of a group's confidential forms. Of course, that information ended up in a leftwing organization on the opposite side of the issue.

A few years before that, California, which had begun demanding its own copy of this private information, accidentally published the private information of donors to over 1,000 nonprofits registered with that State.

These aren't isolated incidents. They are part of a disturbingly hostile climate for certain kinds of political expression and for the free exchange of ideas.

We have seen angry activist mobs deal out personal harassment and professional sabotage to individuals with whom they have a disagreement. We have seen the last administration's IRS focus hostile treatment on certain organizations whose political views ran afoul of the bureaucrat's own opinions.

This is the backdrop which makes Secretary Mnuchin's pro-privacy decision so important. The Democrats want to overrule Secretary Mnuchin's guidance. They want the IRS to resume packing filing cabinets full of the names of Americans who support different causes—even though they can't say why.

That is today. What about tomorrow? Forty-five Senate Democrats are already signed on to a more sweeping piece of legislation known as the DISCLOSE Act, which would amplify and expand this chilling effect in numerous other ways.

For one thing, this bill would cut out the middle man of the leaky IRS and enable direct ideological harassment, increasing disclosure of this private information straight to the public. That is just one example. It would also give the FEC more power to regulate Americans' speech about important issues and many public officials.

So get ready to hear a lot of lofty rhetoric about restoring democracy from the Democratic leader in the House and her allies here in the Senate, but underneath that rhetoric, get ready for legislation that will do more to undermine our constitutional freedoms and chill their exercise than any other bill I can think of in recent memory.

Let's not walk down this road. Let's not chill Americans' exercise of the First Amendment. Let's defend these freedoms today and stay vigilant tomorrow.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the vote

scheduled for 11:30 a.m. this morning occur at 11 a.m. this morning.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Justin George Muzinich, of New York, to be Deputy Secretary of the Treasury.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

HEALTHCARE COSTS

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 30 minutes.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, today I am asking experts at the American Enterprise Institute and Brookings Institute, as well as other leading experts, for specific ideas about how Congress and the President can work together to reduce the cost of healthcare in the United States. Here is why.

Last July, at the Senate HELP Committee's second in a series of five hearings on reducing healthcare costs, Dr. Brent James, a member of the National Academy of Medicine, testified that 30 percent—and perhaps as much as 50 percent—of all the money spent in this country on healthcare is unnecessary. That startled me, and I hope it startles you.

So I asked another witness, Dr. David Lansky from the Pacific Business Group on Health, if he agreed with Dr. James' estimate that 50 percent of all the money spent on healthcare is unnecessary. Dr. Lansky said yes.

Then, in our next hearing on reducing healthcare costs, not one witness on our distinguished panel disagreed with Dr. James. That means we are spending as much as half of all we spend on healthcare on unnecessary treatment, tests, and administrative costs.

As a country, we spend a huge amount on healthcare—\$3.5 trillion in

2017, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. When we use Dr. James' estimates, that means we spent roughly \$1 to \$1.8 trillion on unnecessary healthcare in 2017. That is more money than the gross domestic product of every country in the world except nine. That is three times as much as the Federal Government spends on all of our national defense, 60 times as much as it spends on Pell grants for college students, and about 550 times as much as the Federal Government spends on national parks.

For the last 8 years, most of the debate about healthcare has not been about this extraordinary fact that we may be spending up to half of what we spend on healthcare unnecessarily. Instead, we have been arguing about health insurance. In fact, really, we have been arguing about 6 percent of the health insurance market—the individual insurance market.

The truth is, we will never have lower cost health insurance until we have lower cost healthcare. Instead of continuing to argue over a small percentage of the insurance market, what we should be discussing is the high cost of healthcare that affects virtually every American.

Here is something we ought to be able to agree on. We are spending too much on healthcare, and too much of what we spend is unnecessary. The five hearings we held reminded us of something else we should be able to agree on. One major reason for the unnecessarily high cost of healthcare is that the healthcare system does not operate with the discipline and cost saving benefits of a real market.

Too many barriers to innovation drive up costs, and most Americans have no earthly idea of the true price of healthcare services they buy, which also drives up costs. Let me repeat that. One major reason for the unnecessarily high cost of healthcare is, the healthcare system does not operate with the discipline and the cost-saving benefits of a real market.

Too many barriers to innovation drive up costs, and most Americans have no earthly idea of the price of the healthcare services they buy, so that also drives up costs. As a country—American families, American Federal and State governments, and private companies—we spent \$3.5 trillion on healthcare in 2017, according to CMS, almost as much as we spent on the entire Federal Government in 2017, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

High healthcare costs impact everyone; first, the taxpayer because the Federal Government spends about one-third of all Federal dollars on healthcare. According to the Congressional Budget Office, of the \$3.98 trillion the government spent in 2017, \$1.1 trillion of that was mandatory spending for Medicare, Medicaid, and other healthcare programs.

This Federal Government runaway spending is the principal cause of the

national debt. The principal cause of the national debt is not national defense, national parks, and the National Institutes of Health. The principle cause of the national debt is the runaway government spending on healthcare, which is squeezing the budget for national parks, national defense, and basic biomedical research.

Healthcare costs also impact States, all of which have to balance their budgets. When I was Governor of Tennessee a few years ago, Medicaid was about 8 percent of our State budget. That was in the 1980s. Today, it is 30 percent of Tennessee's State budget. That means States have less to spend on fixing roads, educating children, and helping adults and high school graduates get better job skills.

Second, healthcare spending adds to the cost of doing business in the United States. Warren Buffett has called the ballooning cost of healthcare "a hungry tapeworm on the American economy."

Third and most important, the rising cost of healthcare is squeezing the budgets of American families. According to the Gallup poll, 80 percent of registered voters before this midterm election rated healthcare as "extremely" or "very important" to their vote—a higher percentage than every other issue polled, including the economy, immigration, and taxes.

I imagine every Senator has heard stories from their constituents about struggling to stretch paychecks to afford prescriptions or to cover a surprise medical bill.

Any one of us who has received a medical bill in the mail has wondered, what am I actually paying for?

Here is a story I heard recently. Todd is a Knoxville father who recently took his son to the emergency room after a bicycle accident. His son was treated. Todd paid a \$150 copay because the emergency room was "in network" for his health insurance, and they headed home. So Todd was surprised when he received a bill in the mail for \$1,800 because, even though the emergency room was in network, the doctor who treated his son was not.

Todd wrote his Senator—me—trying to figure out why it is so hard to understand what healthcare prices really are. "If I am expected to be a conscientious consumer of my own healthcare needs," he wrote, "I need a little more help."

The issue of surprise billing is a widely recognized problem. It was highlighted in a report from the White House on healthcare costs just this last Monday.

We want Americans like Todd and his son to be able to access quality care they can afford. So earlier this year, our Senate committee set out, in a bipartisan way, to see what we could find out about lowering healthcare costs. We held five hearings over 6 months.

In June, at our first hearing, we set out to better understand how much healthcare actually costs in the United