

that process for those great employees who are there—and there are really some solid people who are there—they have to log in multiple times and use a whole list of workarounds in their system, which gets bogged down. Each employee there spends 45 minutes a day just going through the logistics of logging in and changing around the system to make it work. There are 45 minutes a day of lost productivity for every single person there.

The good news is that Congress allocated \$30 million to fix the IT problems there. The bad news is that the problems are still there. So we are asking the simple question: Where did that money go? How come the problem wasn't fixed?

We can go on and on with regard to these issues. In page after page, we have tried to lay out sets of solutions—things that we see as problems and inefficiencies in the way our government is working and in the way our Congress is working—and establish what can be done. Our goal is simple. Laying out “Federal Fumbles” is a to-do list for us. This is what we are working on right now along with a lot of other issues.

We encourage every office to glance through it. Ask your staff members to glance through and see the things that they are working on in their offices, and see if we are not laying out some ideas. Let's find ways to work together. Of all of the things to agree on, we should be able to agree that our \$22 trillion of debt needs to be addressed. Let's strategize as to how we are going to solve it. Let's find ways that our government is inefficient and find ways to fix it.

Let me give you one more number.

We met in a bipartisan group last year—eight Republicans and eight Democrats—and tried to solve this issue on budgeting. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful. Those with the Congressional Budget Office visited with us, and we asked them a very specific question as to our current level of debt. If we were to just try to stay at our current level of debt—not grow any more, not get any worse—how much would we have to tax or cut? Their response was \$400 billion a year, every year, for the next 30 years. To just not make the problem worse, we have to either tax more or cut \$400 billion a year, every year, for the next 30 years to keep it from getting worse. That is because, as the CBO stated, Federal outlays, which is how we are spending, are projected to climb from 20.8 percent of the GDP in 2019 to 23 percent by 2029.

The aging of the population and the rising healthcare costs contribute significantly to the growth of spending for the major benefit programs, such as Social Security and Medicare, and the rising debt and higher interest rates drive up the Federal Government's net interest cost.

We have reached a tipping point in interest. Last year, our interest payments were \$325 billion just in the in-

terest on our debt. The CBO estimates that within 10 years our interest payments alone will be \$928 billion. We have crossed over that tipping point we talked about before. Now, just to stay at the status quo, because of the rising interest rates and interest payments, we have to find \$400 billion a year, every year, in new taxes or new cuts.

We are fumbling on the biggest issue that Americans have handed us. It affects our national security. It affects the future of our children. It affects how we take care of those who are in poverty. It affects those who are in the most vulnerable moments of life. It affects those with disabilities, and it affects our transportation.

We have to have a real dialogue about this. We are doing our part. We are trying to get the word out. Let's have a dialogue and together figure out what we can do next in order to solve this because none of us have plans for a \$400 billion cut next year. That means that next year it will again get worse, and it will keep getting worse until we solve it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I appreciate the remarks of my good friend, the Senator from Oklahoma. I look forward to working with him on ways that we can try to come together and solve some of these big problems.

In a minute, I am going to talk about the Affordable Care Act, which is probably the signature accomplishment of a Democratic Senate and Congress. It is notable that the Affordable Care Act, for all of its controversy, reduced the deficit. It did not increase the deficit. It is also notable that the signature accomplishment of the Republican Congress and the Republican Senate was a tax reduction bill that has dramatically spiraled the deficit out of control. There is \$2 trillion of additional deficits in that provision.

I share the concerns about the deficit, and I find it curious that this Congress, under Republican control, has chosen to dramatically increase deficits, making us on pace for having the biggest deficits in our legislative history—with enormous additional new elements of debt as well.

#### NOMINATION OF CHAD A. READLER

Mr. President, I am here, though, to talk about the Affordable Care Act.

One of the things we talk a lot about here on the Senate floor is of our mutual concern for people with preexisting conditions. These are the 130 million Americans who are sick or who have histories of sickness. If you were to listen to both sides of the aisle, you would believe that everyone is on board with the idea that we should provide protections to individuals who are sick or who have ever been sick.

Yet actions do not meet words when it comes down to it in the U.S. Senate.

Over the last 2 years, my Republican colleagues have spared no expense or effort to try to strip away protections

for those individuals with preexisting conditions that were in the Affordable Care Act. The repeal of the Affordable Care Act is the most obvious example of that.

This week, we will have a rare opportunity to take an up-or-down vote on this issue of whether we support keeping protections for people with preexisting conditions in this country. The reason for that is, we are going to vote on a nominee to the Sixth Circuit Court who orchestrated—who directed—the Department of Justice's attempts to take away protections for people with preexisting conditions through the court process.

Chad Readler filed a brief in a case brought by State attorneys general—all of them Republicans—to strike from the Affordable Care Act the protection for people with preexisting conditions.

Normally, when State attorneys general come after the constitutionality of a statute, whether those are Republican or Democratic attorneys general, the administration, whether it be a Republican or Democratic administration, defends the constitutionality of the statute.

This was an exceptional case in which these Republican attorneys general were trying to take away protections for people with preexisting conditions, saying the ACA was unconstitutional, and an Assistant Attorney General by the name of Chad Readler stood up and volunteered to file a brief alleging that, in fact, the attorneys general were right—a rare, almost completely unprecedented example of the Department of Justice arguing against the constitutionality of a statute that had been passed by the Congress and signed by the President.

Interestingly, before Chad Readler decided to file that brief, others at the Department of Justice refused. In fact, one lawyer left the Department of Justice because he wouldn't put his name on something so absurd as the brief Chad Readler filed.

I am not the only person who thinks the arguments in his brief trying to strike down those protections for people with preexisting conditions was absurd. In fact, Senator ALEXANDER read Readler's brief and said the arguments in it were “as far-fetched as any I have ever heard.” That is a Republican Senator.

Now, the consequences of the judge following the recommendations of Chad Readler were catastrophic. In fact, the judge struck down the Affordable Care Act. That order has been held in abeyance temporarily, but the consequences of the Readler brief would be that 133 million Americans would lose their protections from higher rates because they were sick or had been sick. The 20 million people who had insurance would lose it virtually overnight.

Admittedly, the Readler brief didn't agree with every single element of the lawsuit of the attorneys general but enough of it such that it was very clear

the administration was weighing in on the side of the petitioners.

Almost immediately after filing that brief, he was nominated to serve on the appellate court, sending a very clear signal to all of those in the administration that if you take a leadership role on trying to strip away protections for people with preexisting conditions, you will be rewarded—in this case, rewarded with a lifetime appointment.

So we are about to vote on the architect of this administration's legal strategy to try to undo the most popular, most important protections in the Affordable Care Act, and it represents this rare opportunity to understand where Senators stand.

It is super easy. It takes no political risk to stand up and say you support protecting people who are sick and making sure insurance companies don't jack up their rates. As it turns out, it is a little bit harder to actually back up your words with actions, but this one isn't that hard. Voting against Chad Readler isn't that difficult, in part, because Senator BROWN, who is the Senator from Ohio who did not sign a blue slip for Chad Readler's nomination, has made it clear as early as 10 minutes ago that he is willing to support and sign a blue slip for a mainstream conservative nominee.

In this case, Democrats aren't saying we want a nominee to the Sixth Circuit who isn't one who could be charitably described as a conservative nominee. We just don't want a nominee who has made his mark trying to tear down protections for sick people in this country, but that is what happens when you get rid of the blue slip. Senator MCCONNELL and Senator GRASSLEY have gotten rid of this decades-old protection to try to make sure nominees to the Federal bench, to the appellate bench in this case, have the support of their home State Senators. When you do that, you tend to get a little bit more mainstream nominees.

Now that the blue slip is gone, now that Senator BROWN has no ability to weigh in on individuals who are going to be making law in his State, you get a much more extreme nominee like this.

So let's see what happens. I hope there are some Republicans who will stand up and decide they are going to put their votes where their mouths have been on the question of protections for people with preexisting conditions, but at the very least, the American public will get to see where we all stand on this very important question in a matter of hours.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, in the 116th Congress, I am once again chairing the Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, which oversees our nuclear forces.

Over the coming months, I will be coming to the floor to discuss specific components of our nuclear deterrent and their contributions to the defense of this Nation.

Today, I rise to speak about the critical role strategic bombers play in our nuclear triad. The triad is known for its flexibility and resilience, and bombers contribute to this flexibility in important ways. They are highly visible, and they can be forward deployed. They can be used to signal resolve to our adversaries and commitment to our allies.

This benefit is not theoretical. Bombers have been used in exactly this way many times, particularly on the Korean Peninsula. Bombers are also recallable and, when armed with standoff weapons, they can offer the President a variety of tailored response options in a crisis.

As the oldest leg of our nuclear triad, bombers have a long and distinguished history. In some ways, the story of the strategic bomber begins in the great State of Nebraska.

In the early 1940s, Bellevue, NE, was home to the Martin Bomber Plant, which was located on the land that is now Offutt Air Force Base. The Martin plant, with the help of thousands of Nebraska workers, built and modified the Enola Gay and Bockscar. These two B-29 bombers went on to deliver the Little Boy and Fat Man nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending World War II and ushering in the nuclear age. The horrific destruction of these attacks established the deterrent power that has prevented conflict on a global scale ever since.

As ballistic missile technology evolved, the bomber continued to be the mainstay of our nuclear deterrent forces through the early 1970s. Although bombers carried the heavy load for many decades, today we no longer rely on them in the same way. Nuclear-armed bombers have not been on 24-hour ready alert status since the end of the Cold War in 1991, and the responsiveness that alert-status bombers provided now resides primarily with our ICBM forces.

The strength provided by the other legs of the triad have allowed us to take our nuclear capable bombers off alert and use them for conventional missions. When we send B-52 bombers to Afghanistan to complete a conventional mission, we exercise the triad's flexibility. When U.S. B-2 bombers struck targets in Libya, we utilized the triad's flexibility. These examples clearly demonstrate that the flexibility of the triad is not an abstract concept. It is something our forces use every single day.

Our current nuclear bomber force consists of 46 B-52 and 20 B-2 aircraft.

While we rely on this highly capable but aging fleet, we also look ahead to the future of the bomber force, and that is the B-21.

As the B-21 development progresses, it is important to remember the lessons learned from the last time we developed a nuclear bomber, the B-2. As the Cold War ended, nuclear tensions cooled and the need for an expensive nuclear-capable stealth bomber seemed to diminish. Even though the B-2 had already been developed and significant resources spent on research and development, Congress decided to reduce the final order from 132 aircraft to 20. In so doing, the per-unit cost of the airframe rose to \$2 billion. The Air Force has said it plans to buy at least 100 B-21s, but many in this Chamber believe more are likely required to meet the conventional mission the Nation expects our Air Force to perform.

The nuclear triad is the bedrock of our national security, and the airborne leg continues to contribute to the strength and resilience of our nuclear forces. It is our responsibility to ensure that this capability is modernized, particularly as the global security environment transitions to one of long-term strategic competition.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess under the previous order.

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

#### RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:05 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and was reassembled when called to order by the Presiding officer (Mrs. CAPITO).

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

#### TRIBUTE TO RICHARD C. SHELBY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I want to start my remarks this afternoon by saying congratulations to our friend Senator RICHARD SHELBY, Alabama's longest serving U.S. Senator as of this Sunday.

Here in Washington, we know him as chairman of the all-powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, which holds the congressional purse strings, but Alabamians, from Huntsville to Gulf Shores, know him as a devoted public servant working for the good of all of his constituents and an invaluable Member of the U.S. Senate.

Senator SHELBY is a man of principles. He believes in smaller government, supports the Second Amendment, and works tirelessly for the military men and women from Alabama.