

Unfortunately, our colleagues across the aisle have pulled every trick in the book to slow down the nominations process, not because they have objected to a particular nominee or because a nominee has been unqualified, but because it has been part of a broader effort to stymie the President and this administration and bring the work of this body to a crawl.

With each day that has passed since the President has been inaugurated, the growing backlog of nominations has allowed hundreds of important positions throughout the Federal Government to have remained vacant. That is not fair to the people who have been nominated; that is not fair to the administration; and it is particularly not fair to the American people, whom these individuals are to serve.

A couple of months ago, we passed a modest rules change that broke the logjam, at least to some extent, and allowed us to finally begin to make some much needed progress. In the, roughly, 3 months prior to the rules change, we were able to confirm only 23 nominees. In the, roughly, 2 months since, we have more than doubled that number. We have begun to fill dozens of positions, including those of Federal judges, ambassadorships, and sub-Cabinet officials at various Departments and Agencies. Two weeks ago, we confirmed the 41st circuit court judge since President Trump took office, and we are making progress on filling more judicial vacancies.

As we approach the 2-year anniversary of Susan Combs' nomination having been sent to the Senate, I am glad we can finally vote on her confirmation and continue our work to confirm well-qualified nominees.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, on another matter, we continue to hear cries from the left about Medicare for All—the one-size-fits-all healthcare plan they continue to embrace.

It is ironic, in having been in this Chamber during the battle over the Affordable Care Act and when President Obama famously said “If you like your policy, you can keep it,” that now, apparently, the Democrats have abandoned that promise. Instead, their promise is, if you like your employer-provided health insurance policy, you can't keep it.

The fact is that this plan would drain the vital program that our seniors have relied on for more than a half a century and would force all Americans to participate in a watered-down version, which, clearly, would not be financially sustainable. More than 180 million Americans would be kicked off of their private insurance plans and be forced onto a government-run plan. This strikes me as a solution in search of a problem.

Don't get me wrong. Our healthcare system isn't perfect, and there are things we need to do to make it better, but they don't want to pay higher taxes and be put on the same

healthcare plan as every other American. They want to be able to choose their coverage at prices that work best for them and their families, and, yes, we need to improve our healthcare system so it focuses on patients and allows all individuals and families to choose what works best for them. Fortunately, Senate Republicans have been working hard to create legislation that would do exactly that.

Earlier this year, I cosponsored the Protect Act, which is being led by our colleague from North Carolina, Senator TILLIS. This bill would make sure that no one would be denied coverage or would be forced to pay a higher premium because of one's having a pre-existing condition. With the future of ObamaCare hanging in the balance, we need to provide peace of mind for the millions of Americans who have pre-existing conditions and who worry about the uncertainty of their healthcare.

This legislation would also prohibit discrimination against patients based on their health status. That includes denying coverage, limiting what treatments are covered, or increasing premiums because of one's having a pre-existing condition. This is an important step we can and should take to affirm that all Americans deserve access to affordable care at affordable prices. In addition, by codifying the association health plans, we can help self-employed individuals and small business employees who don't receive employer-provided coverage.

Association health plans were initially established by the Department of Labor. They allow businesses in the same region or industry to come together and purchase insurance. These plans have proven to be a great solution for small businesses across the country that represent a host of small businesses and sole proprietors because they are afforded the opportunity of getting, essentially, the same quality of coverage provided by large employers but at the same lower prices that people pay who are in these large employer-provided plans.

Historically, the problem has been in the individual market, which is where most of these individuals would find themselves, in that the pool of risks is not sufficiently broad. Because of perverse incentives, they would actually end up paying much higher premiums than other people who would be similarly situated who would have employer-provided plans.

Association health plans address that directly by providing a larger pool of insured individuals, which would help to bring down the premiums and help to bring down the deductibles over what they are currently under the Affordable Care Act. Several chambers in Texas are using these association health plans for their members, and I would like to be able to provide more flexibility for AHPs so that more Americans may take advantage of this employer-provided insurance.

In codifying this Labor Department rule and making insurance more affordable and accessible, we must also look at healthcare costs beyond the premiums people pay for their health insurance. That is why we need to take a look at out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs. When it comes to drugs that have just come on the market after lengthy research and development, you would expect the prices to be higher. That is the price we pay for the innovation and lifesaving new drugs. Companies patent their drugs to ensure that the money spent during the research and development phases can be recovered once the drugs hit pharmacy shelves.

These patents—a form of individual property protection—are important in order to encourage innovation. Unfortunately, on occasion, we see companies that abuse this system and try to get new patents on existing drugs in order to prolong their exclusivity and, of course, to maintain the high profits they get on a patented drug. This type of behavior is not what Congress intended. We cannot allow bad actors to game the system in order to turn higher profits and prevent more Americans from getting access to these drugs at lower prices, which is what the system is designed to do once they go off patent.

Recently, I introduced the Affordable Prescriptions for Patients Act, which encourages competition within the pharmaceutical industry by stopping these sorts of corrupt practices. The bill would define product hopping and patent thickets—two practices used by some manufacturers—as anticompetitive behavior. Certainly, this doesn't prevent manufacturers from making improvements in their products. It doesn't limit patent rights, and it doesn't hamper innovation. Yet it does stop those who knowingly abuse the patent system by allowing the Federal Trade Commission to bring antitrust suits against the bad actors.

In addition to these bills, I recently introduced a bill to protect the integrity of the Medicare part D system. This is the prescription drug system that Congress created years ago, which actually provides seniors with access to prescription drugs at a modest cost. Currently, part D's sponsors may voluntarily report fraud data to the CMS, but they are not required to report the specific number of instances of fraud, waste, and abuse they identify or the actions they take to correct these problems. This bill would implement recommendations made by the Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General to require plan sponsors to report fraud and improve oversight of this important program.

These are the types of reforms we need. We don't need Medicare for All, which will force 180 million people off of their private health insurance and bankrupt the Medicare system that we pledged to be there to provide access to healthcare for our seniors once they

qualify. These are the types of reforms we need instead. Overhauling our entire healthcare system to put everyone on the same subpar plan would not help anyone.

The way I see it is we have two options. One option is Medicare for All, which forces everyone onto the same plan. The government tells you what clinic to go to, what doctor to see, what brand of prescription you can get access to. You lose the power to make decisions about your own healthcare, and you simply have to take what you get on somebody else's timeframe. That is Medicare for All. It would simultaneously ruin Medicare by forcing all 330 million Americans onto the same plan, which will bring down the quality of care for our seniors, who have paid over the years into the plan, and which will bankrupt our country in the process.

I think there is a better choice, a better option. Rather than the government's telling you what you have to do, let's make smart, targeted reforms that allow patients to determine the coverage and care they want at more affordable prices. I believe we can implement these reforms in a way that will bring down costs without reducing choice.

We can continue to protect Americans with preexisting conditions, which is something we all agree should be done. We can lower the costs of prescriptions and out-of-pocket costs and stop the bad actors who game the system. We can provide the States with more flexibility to allow for more coverage options so that families can pick the plans that are right for them. Yes, we can also encourage innovation so our country will remain at the forefront of medical solutions and innovation.

Those are two words you don't ordinarily see—"government-run" plan and "innovation"—in the same sentence. As a matter of fact, they are polar opposites.

Finally, we need to preserve Medicare for our seniors who have paid into this over their lifetime.

I appreciate my colleagues who are hard at work to make these kinds of reforms a reality. And I have heard from my constituents loud and clear. When it comes to healthcare, they want more choices, more affordability, not the one-size-fits-all that Medicare for All would provide.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

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

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:30 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. BURR).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

Mr. LANKFORD. I rise to remind the Senate of two anniversaries that are happening this week. This week is the 75th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy. It is commonly known as D-Day. One hundred sixty-thousand-plus individuals crossed the English Channel by aircraft, by boat. They moved in every way possible, starting in the middle of the night and with the major invasion that was the largest naval invasion in the history of the world. They would have crossed into France—what was the beginning of the end of Nazi Germany.

The loss of lives of Americans and Allied forces was catastrophic as they pushed in. The boys, 18, 19, 20 years old, got on aircraft, got on ships, launched out into the water, knowing there was a tyrant on the other side who had to be stopped. It is entirely appropriate for the Nation to pause to remember D-Day, to know the freedom we have right now was protected by a generation that stood for that freedom. As the Nation looks toward Normandy a couple days from now, I think we should once again thank the "greatest generation" that guarded our freedom.

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 19TH AMENDMENT

Mr. President, today is also a 100-year anniversary, though. One hundred years ago today, June 4, 1919, the Senate voted to pass the right for women to vote. As a son of a pretty amazing mom and as the husband of a really remarkable lady and as the dad of two daughters who are both voters now—they cannot thank the ladies enough who started in the 1800s working toward a basic human dignity and right; that is, the right for people to vote. It is astounding to us as a nation to think that it took that long, all the way up until 1919, to have a vote in the Senate to allow women to vote. That vote—with 36 Republicans and 20 Democrats that day who voted on June 4, 1919—changed the direction of how we would vote and how we would cooperate together as a nation.

Now, we have a lot of other areas to fix, but that one was a big one, and my family is grateful for what was done in the past. People who come through the Rotunda of the Capitol often see a statue there that looks like it is not finished. It is a block of stone, and there are three ladies who are carved out of it, but a part of it is not carved. I often hear people say they don't understand that statue. That statue is Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott, the three ladies who led the movement of ladies all over the country to just speak out and say ladies should have the right to vote. Those three ladies are carved into stone that is in our Rotunda, but what is interesting is, the statue is unfinished because the assumption was in the days ahead, there would be more ladies in the future who would step out and would lead a nation to make sure that we allow the rights of every single individual to be honored.

So, for the sake of my mom and my aunt, my grandmother, my wife, my daughters, and millions of ladies, we cannot thank those ladies enough for standing up for what was right at that time period. I think it is appropriate that we pause for just a moment in the Senate and remember June 4, 1919, 100 years later, and thank those ladies for standing up for the rights of ladies in their generation and the ladies in the generations to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

JOB CORPS

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, everywhere I go in Montana, I hear the same thing from my State's business owners and job creators of the State; that they need more workers. They need more highly skilled welders, bricklayers, heavy machine operators, and laborers. The list goes on and on. I will tell you that I think the biggest limiting factor to moving our economy forward is a well-trained workforce. These businesses give living-wage jobs to the folks who are able to fill them, if they have the skills to fill them.

That is why I was so appalled when the Trump administration recklessly and cluelessly moved to close so many successful Job Corps programs across this country.

While we have heard there is some sort of reprieve for the Anaconda Job Corps, we have not received word that actually means it is going to stay open or any of the other Job Corps across this country—16 of which were scheduled for privatization and 9 of which were out-and-out closures—will stay open.

In Montana's case, we have two successful Civilian Conservation Corps programs: the Anaconda Job Corps and the Trapper Creek Job Corps. The Anaconda Job Corps, of course, is in Anaconda, MT. The Trapper Creek Job Corps is in Darby. These two job training centers play an active role in our State's economy.

We have a foundry in Butte, MT. It is called Montana Precision Products. Mike Robbins is a co-owner of that. This company has hired more than 50 Job Corps graduates in recent years alone—more than 50—most of whom, if not all, were from the Anaconda Job Corps. He has promoted these folks—some of them—from entry level to mid-level managers.

So when Mike and his brother Burt need high-skilled employees, the first place they look is the Job Corps. Why? Because these folks come out with a skill set that fits their needs.

Now, you may ask: Who is going into the Job Corps? These are at-risk folks. These are folks who are having a hard time with life and a hard time getting a job, and they go in the Job Corps—young people—and they give them a skill, a skill they can use in the private sector, a skill that if the Trump administration has their way, they will no longer be able to receive.