

States that expand Medicaid find that rural families have a dramatically higher likelihood of having insurance than those in rural areas where the States haven't expanded Medicaid.

As of now, 36 States, including Virginia, have expanded Medicaid and 14 have not. I am thrilled that earlier this year Virginia, after a multiyear battle, finally announced that Medicaid expansion was happening. In less than a year after expansion, nearly 293,000 adults are newly enrolled in Medicaid in Virginia, many of whom never had health insurance before in their lives—293,000 adults in a State where the population is about 8.5 million. That is a significant number of people who have received insurance through Medicaid expansion. They risk losing their eligibility if the administration is successful in its efforts to gut the ACA.

If we care about rural residents and rural communities, there are a number of things we can do.

First, we need to stand up against the administration's attempt to end the ACA, including its Medicaid expansion.

I have now been in public life for 25 years since I was elected to the Richmond City Council in May 1994. I will say that in all of the elections I have been in, up or down, and all the various legislative and other battles, the single most dramatic moment in my life as an elected official was standing on the floor of this body at 2 o'clock in the morning when Senator John McCain, fresh out of a hospital after being diagnosed with a glioblastoma brain tumor, cast the deciding vote, and by one vote—one vote—we saved the Affordable Care Act. I have never in my life in the public realm experienced something that was so dramatic and so consequential.

We have to continue to stand up. I would have thought that vote might have moved us to a new chapter where we would be talking about fixing and improving rather than repealing, but that is not the case, as evidenced by the lawsuit today. But my hope is that we will resist efforts to sabotage and destroy and instead join together in efforts to improve. I have joined with my colleagues to cosponsor a resolution allowing Senate legal counsel to intervene in the lawsuit, to defend the Affordable Care Act.

The second thing we can do to help rural communities is focus on the 14 States that haven't yet expanded Medicaid and provide them a clearer path and encouragement to do so.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of something called the SAME Act, which would extend the same level of Federal assistance to every State that chooses to expand Medicaid regardless of when the expansion occurs. I think that is important.

Let's use the original Medicaid Program as an example. It was passed in 1965. It was not a mandate; it was an option. The last State—Arizona; State 50—that joined didn't join until 1982.

There was a 17-year period between when the first State joined the then-voluntary Medicaid Program and when the last State joined.

Let's make sure that whenever States join, they are treated the same. If this bill passes, States that choose to expand now—these 14 States—we would make sure that they get the full Federal level of assistance as was available to those States that initially joined, and that should help remaining States get off the sidelines.

Finally, we need to stand up against administrative sabotage to the Affordable Care Act. We shouldn't promote skimpy insurance plans. We shouldn't slash funding for enrollment, outreach, or marketing. We should build on and improve and, yes, fix—because it is not perfect—the ACA to extend its promise of affordable coverage to even more Americans.

That is why I have introduced Medicare-X legislation to establish a public insurance plan that could be offered on the ACA exchanges, beginning in rural areas. My bill would also make the ACA's tax credits more generous, expand tax credit eligibility to additional families, and allow for an enhanced reimbursement rate in rural communities where low patient volumes often pose financial challenges to healthcare providers.

In closing, the ACA has meant the difference between life and death for many families across the country, and I run into them every day.

I am going to be standing with some Senate colleagues on the steps of the Senate in a few minutes talking about a youngster from Winchester, VA, who has a series of significant healthcare challenges that would essentially in the past have made him uninsurable because of preexisting conditions but who now—because of that protection within the ACA, he and his family at least have the peace of mind of knowing that he can't be kicked off insurance or turned down for insurance because he happened to be born with a condition over which he had no control.

If the ACA were to be struck down, families and communities would suffer, and I think that in Virginia, that would particularly be the case in our rural communities.

Again, I am just going to hold up this issue of our rural hospitals. We need to protect rural hospitals not only because of the healthcare they provide but because they are employment centers and centers of community outreach. When we see the closure of rural hospitals overwhelmingly being in States that have not expanded Medicaid, that tells us how valuable that portion of the ACA has been to stabilize the provision of rural healthcare.

I will continue to fight to protect the ACA and the health of my rural communities in Virginia and elsewhere. I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, we received more good economic news on Friday with the announcement that the economy created 224,000 jobs in June.

Meanwhile, unemployment remained near its lowest level in half a century. June marked the 16th straight month that unemployment has been at or below 4 percent. That is a tremendous record.

June also marked the 11th straight month that wage growth has been at or above 3 percent. Before 2018, wage growth had not hit 3 percent in nearly a decade.

Friday's announcement was just the latest piece of good news about the economy. Thanks to Republican economic policies, the economy has taken off during the Trump administration. Economic growth is up, wage growth is up, personal income is up, and the list goes on.

Importantly, the benefits of this economic growth are being spread far and wide. One of the distinguishing features of the economic expansion that we have been experiencing is the way it has been reaching those who have trailed behind economically.

Over the past 3 years, pay hikes for the lowest income workers have exceeded pay hikes for the richest workers. Huge numbers of new blue-collar jobs have been created, and the employment situation for minorities has improved substantially.

The unemployment rates for Asian Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans are all at or near record lows. The Wall Street Journal notes that "Nearly one million more blacks and two million more Hispanics are employed than when Barack Obama left office, and minorities account for more than half of all new jobs created during the Trump Presidency."

So where has all this economic progress come from? At the end of the Obama administration, 2½ years ago, the economic outlook wasn't too rosy. The economy was sputtering, and American families were struggling. Some were predicting that a weak economy would be the new normal.

Republicans, however, didn't agree with that. We knew that American workers and American businesses were as dynamic and creative as ever. But we also knew that burdensome regulations and an outdated tax code were holding our economy back and reducing the opportunities available to workers. So when we took office in 2017, we got right to work on improving

our economy in order to improve life for the American people.

We eliminated burdensome regulations that were acting as a drag on economic growth, and we passed a historic reform of our Tax Code to put money in Americans' pockets and make it easier for businesses to grow and to create jobs. Now we are seeing the results: a thriving economy that is extending more opportunities to more Americans.

For all of Democrats' talk about inequality, it is actually Republicans and President Trump who have done something about it. We have helped create an economy that is lifting up people across the entire economic spectrum.

There is still more work to be done, of course. For one thing, we need to make sure that the agriculture economy is able to catch up to the economy at large. But thanks to tax reform and other Republican economic policies, American workers are doing better than they have in a very long time.

It is unfortunate that the gains we have made would be reversed if Democrats have their way. Democrats' plans—from budget-busting government-run healthcare to free college—all have one thing in common: They would cost a lot of money.

Where would the government get most of that money? From tax increases—tax increases on businesses and tax increases on ordinary Americans.

Thanks to the tax relief that Republicans passed, the economy has expanded, paychecks have increased, and more jobs and opportunities have been created.

Raising taxes would result in the opposite: fewer jobs and opportunities, a smaller economy, and more families struggling to get by on smaller paychecks.

Republicans are determined to make sure that doesn't happen. We are committed to building on the progress we have made and further expanding economic opportunity for all Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

HONG KONG

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the very high-stakes political and social crisis that has been unfolding in Hong Kong over the past several weeks.

Hong Kong is a very exceptional city. It boasts of a very robust free market economy that has thrived for centuries. It has a very vibrant free press. It has an independent judiciary and a partially democratic election system. Those freedoms, combined with Hongkongers' natural entrepreneurial spirit and appreciation for individual liberty, have made Hong Kong a jewel of the financial and business world, one of the freest places in Asia, and a great place to live—for a time, anyway, as I did back in 1991.

Economic and political achievements are particularly impressive when you

consider that Hong Kong is, after all, a part of China, which has neither a free economy nor a politically free society.

Back in 1997, Great Britain transferred Hong Kong to China on a condition—an explicit written agreement—that Hong Kong's social and economic systems would remain unchanged under a "one country, two systems" arrangement that would last for at least 50 years, until 2047.

The Chinese Government also made a pledge at the time—a pledge that Hong Kong's legislative and executive leaders would be elected through "universal suffrage." Yet, here we are, 22 years later. Hongkongers still do not enjoy complete universal suffrage, and Hong Kong has faced deep and persistent efforts by the mainland to erode the independence and the authority of Hongkongers.

On the surface, this ongoing crisis in Hong Kong was clearly caused by the Hong Kong Government, probably at the behest of the Chinese leadership in Beijing to pass a deeply unpopular extradition bill. This bill would diminish Hong Kong's independent legal system very dramatically, and it would do so by allowing and exposing individuals in Hong Kong—including Hong Kong citizens, foreigners, and even tourists—to being extradited to China.

The accused would then face prosecution by an authoritarian government in mainland China that does not uphold the rule of law, nor does it practice the fair and impartial administration of justice. Let's face it. The judicial system in China is politicized and controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

Some people are concerned that if this bill were to become law, it would even pave the way for Chinese state-sponsored kidnapping of dissidents. It certainly would have a chilling effect on freedom in Hong Kong, a chilling effect on the ability of Hong Kong people to live their lives and express their views without the fear of political repercussions. It is simply a fact that mainland China is a legal black hole, and Hong Kong's extradition bill would be a step to exposing Hong Kong residents directly to mainland China's opaque and often blatantly unfair legal system.

In response to this threat, the people of Hong Kong have for weeks poured into the streets, calling for a withdrawal of this bill and deeper democratic reforms. Remarkably, last month, one of these protests—one of these demonstrations brought together an estimated 2 million Hongkongers into the streets. It is stunning anywhere in the world that 2 million people would come out to protest anything. But in Hong Kong, it is truly staggering because the total population of Hong Kong is only 7.4 million. That is about one in four Hongkongers who were on the streets protesting.

Just today, the Hong Kong Chief Executive said that bill was dead. But it has not been formally withdrawn, as I

understand it, and I think the threat remains.

It is also important to note that on a deeper level these ongoing protests are really a response to efforts by the Chinese Government to "mainlandize" Hong Kong. It is an effort in which political, cultural, and even physical distinctions between Hong Kong and mainland China are meant to be diminished, the differences blurred, and the distinction eroded.

The extradition bill is just the latest example of the Hong Kong people's struggle for the freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights that they cherish, that they want to hold on to, and that were promised to them when the handover occurred in 1997.

Hongkongers really have a rich history of protest, and I think that history reveals their enduring grassroots desire for the freedoms they have grown to love and cherish and for a democratic form of government that they deserve.

Back in 1989, the Tiananmen Square massacre that we all remember—the 30th anniversary was just last month. On the eve of the massacre, once it was clear the Chinese Communist Government would respond to peaceful protesters with bullets and tanks—once that became clear, about 1.5 million Hongkongers marched in the streets of Hong Kong in solidarity with the students in Tiananmen.

In 2003, the Hong Kong leadership proposed an anti-subversion bill. Hongkongers rightly saw this bill as an attack on their freedom of speech and freedom of association. The Hong Kong leadership proposed it—again, doing it at the behest of the mainland Chinese Government—and 500,000 citizens protested and eventually forced the government to withdraw the bill.

In 2014, the Hong Kong Government announced a reform to change how Hong Kong's Chief Executive was selected. The proposal was meant to continue what already existed, and that was mainland Chinese Communist control over the election process in Hong Kong. One of the mechanisms they used to achieve this was that only candidates vetted by a committee of mostly pro-Beijing supporters would be allowed to seek the office of Chief Executive.

In response to this undemocratic measure, Hong Kong students staged a campaign of civil disobedience and peaceful protest to oppose this effort. Up to a half a million people participated in the movement. Students famously used umbrellas to shield themselves from tear gas and pepper spray that was being launched at them by the police, so much so that the pro-democracy protesters were quickly termed the "Umbrella Movement."

All of these protests and acts of civil disobedience make it clear that Hongkongers want more freedom, not less freedom.

I think this matters. This matters obviously in Hong Kong, but it matters