

I would note for Senators how the Republican chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Senator SHELBY, and I, as vice chairman, have kept the process in a bipartisan fashion. Almost all of our appropriations bills have come out of committee unanimously or virtually unanimously. They have come to the floor, and then they have gotten an overwhelming vote. Let's rely on those Senators in both parties who are willing to set aside political posturing and who are willing to set aside symbolism and instead have substance.

In addition to continuing to fund our government for 4 more weeks, our bill tackles some issues that have to be addressed right away. It provides the Commerce Department with the necessary funds to carry out the decennial census, which is required by our Constitution. It provides funds for mobile centers to ensure that the census reaches those in the hardest to reach areas. It fulfills our constitutional obligation to make sure every American is counted.

The bill includes a provision that would block a looming \$7.6 billion rescission of highway funding set to hit the States July 1—the States of virtually everybody in this Chamber, Republican and Democratic alike. Without this provision, each of our States would see significant cuts to its highway funding. That is the last thing we need given the dire state of infrastructure in America today.

The bill includes a pay raise for the military, which is set to go into effect in January. It also includes legislation to ensure that victims of state-sponsored terrorism get the compensation they are entitled to. More importantly, it ensures that the government remains funded and open while we continue to work on full-year appropriations bills.

Now, even if we passed this bill today or tomorrow, we have only 4 short weeks to complete our work. It can be done. I am committed to staying here, as we have in the past. We all worked nights, weekends, and I must say the tremendous Appropriations Committee staff worked even more hours.

But it cannot be a one-sided negotiation. And we cannot be expected to divert billions more in taxpayer dollars to fulfill President Trump's cynical campaign promise as part of the final deal. It does not have the support in this Chamber or among the American people to carry the day.

If we had an up-or-down vote in this body—will you take this money away from housing for our troops, for medical research, and all these other things, to pay for an ineffective wall so the President will not be embarrassed by not keeping his word that Mexico was going to pay for it? Of course, that would fail. Of course, that would fail. Nobody wants to go back home and say they did that.

We have billions of dollars in here to keep our borders secure. We want to keep our borders secure. Everybody

wants to, Republican and Democrats alike, but let's not waste the money on symbolism, especially if it means we do not do our medical research or take care of housing for our troops among all the other things I have listed. Do not do a bill with the hopes of, someday, Mexico will pay us back, just because the President promised they would. We all know they are not going to.

So, with that being said, we have made some progress. I do not go and call press conferences like some of my colleague do each moment along the way, but I have been working closely with a bipartisan group. We all look forward to continue to work with Chairman SHELBY and Chairwoman LOWEY and with Ranking Member GRANGER to get these bills across the finish line.

We owe it to the American people, and we have demonstrated—I think Senator SHELBY as chair, myself as vice chair, we have demonstrated that we can get the bills through with an overwhelming bipartisan vote. Just let us do it. Let's go forward and pass them. Let's do substance over symbolism.

With that, Mr. President, I see my distinguished colleague on the floor, so I will yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAMER). The Senator from Tennessee.

#### INTERNET EXCHANGE ACT

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, it is so interesting to be here on the floor and to hear such a variety of ideas and to know that, across the country, people are logging on and they are tuning in and they are watching how we go about our business. And one of the things that is so interesting as we pull the Internet and online activity into our lives and stay connected, we sometimes enjoy the idea of just “unplugging” for a weekend, going to somewhere in the country that holds a really special appeal. Certainly at this time of year, people will talk about going away for Thanksgiving, or maybe they went away during the fall to look at pretty leaves.

They see it as an escape and maybe even an opportunity to get just a little bit of smugness in their tone when they talk about how they have chosen a destination that has politely informed them to not expect WiFi and not to expect that Internet connection.

But here is a question for you: How many would make that trip, but still knowing there is not that connection, they take the smartphone, the iPad, or the laptop anyway? Of course, we know we all do that.

After all, we have been trained to respond to the buzzing, beeping, and the ringing of our device, and so eventually, what happens is we give up and we start wandering around, searching for a signal, and then declaring to all of the very unimpressed locals: Well, I don't see how y'all do it without being able to have access to high-speed Internet. How can you survive without broadband?

Well, to my colleagues, let me say this: They do it because they do not have a choice. You know, these days, encountering so much as a spotty cell signal causes concern for those of us who are accustomed to high-speed Internet and broadband connectivity, but I will tell you there are millions of Americans out there for whom a broadband connection or even the pop and hiss of a dialup connection is completely out of reach.

In a world where even simple online interactions require lightning fast connections, economies in rural America are falling behind. We read every day about entire industries setting up shop in budding metropolises like Nashville, TN, but to many, corporate America's glowing new hubs sound like remote outposts compared to the familiar crush that is here on the eastern seaboard.

Our perspective is skewed. Even so, businesses move inward because they see potential for growth with minimal risk, but there is only so far that they can push it. Rural communities do not have much to offer in terms of operational support or a reliable customer base, and most of them lack a crucial resource: the funding and infrastructure to back reliable broadband services.

It is true, “the cloud” needs a physical connection to Planet Earth, and broadband networks rely on physical “Internet Exchange” points. Without these hubs, subscribers of different Internet providers cannot communicate with one another.

While many businesses are certainly capable of fronting the costs associated with building the actual exchange points and running connections to other hubs, there is no incentive for them to gamble on a stagnant economy, so they go elsewhere, and local businesses go nowhere, unable to expand into the global online marketplace.

And just to think, a decade ago, we wasted an opportunity to bridge the digital divide, to even close the digital divide. Back in 2009, during the stimulus days, President Obama signed an economic recovery package that included 7.2 billion, \$7.2 billion to expand broadband services in underserved areas.

Well, predictably, those dollars began to flow into urban and suburban areas, leaving rural communities stranded on the far side of a gulf that Washington had ended up widening. Mistakes were made, but it would be an even bigger mistake to make rural residents suffer through it.

This year, I introduced the bipartisan Internet Exchange Act in an effort to get the Senate talking about broadband accessibility. When passed, the bill will offset the start-up cost of establishing broadband connections via a series of grants reserved exclusively for unserved rural areas. That is unserved rural areas, those that have been left out, those that did not benefit

from the \$7.2 billion that President Obama put in the stimulus for broadband expansion.

They did not get any of that money. They got left further behind and pushed further out of the economic mainstream for the 21st century. As with any program, infrastructure alone is no guarantee of success, but the presence of new and expanded Internet exchange facilities will create a stronger and more competitive web. More hubs will enable faster data transmissions, allowing local businesses to expand and, in rural communities, e-commerce to flourish.

Farmers, manufacturers, miners, will gain access to state-of-the-art technologies that support safer and more productive operations. Medical practitioners will be able to care for neglected populations via telemedicine. Schools and libraries will have advanced tools at their fingertips and open the world to their students. The local law enforcement will add an important tool in their “public safety toolbox.” Businesses looking to lay down roots will notice that rural communities are investing in themselves and, hopefully, make the decision to bring jobs and business opportunities to local workers and to rural America.

But perhaps, most importantly, rural residents and their guests will be able to decide for themselves whether they want to connect or unplug, and they will be able to do it on their own terms.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 455

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to raise awareness about the open enrollment period for health insurance marketplace coverage.

Between now and December 15, Granite Staters and Americans across the country can enroll in healthcare plans for 2020 through the Affordable Care Act’s health insurance marketplaces. Tens of thousands of Granite Staters and millions of Americans will be eligible for Federal premium tax credits to help pay the cost of monthly premiums as well as financial assistance to reduce the cost of annual deductibles. I am sad to say the Trump administration refuses to be a reliable partner in helping to spread the word about open enrollment.

For the third year in a row, we have an administration that has focused on sabotaging the Affordable Care Act instead of raising awareness for open enrollment. This administration is even focusing resources on promoting enrollment and junk health plans that

don’t provide coverage for preexisting conditions and that don’t meet the Affordable Care Act’s comprehensive coverage requirements.

After failing to repeal the Affordable Care Act in the Senate, the Trump administration is making an end-run around Congress, trying to dismantle the ACA through regulations, administrative actions, and lawsuits in the Federal court.

As we can see in this chart, 2 years ago, the administration cut funding for advertising and outreach efforts to promote open enrollment by 90 percent. The administration went from \$100 million—we can see on that bar—down to \$10 million in 2017 and \$10 million in 2018 and \$10 million in 2019.

These advertising cuts are pennywise and pound foolish. They are part of the administration’s concerted attempt to keep Americans in the dark about what their insurance options are.

Federal advertising on television and through digital platforms and other media is critical to drawing a healthy and balanced mix of consumers into the marketplace. In fact, research shows that California’s State-level investments in marketing and advertising for open enrollment generated a 3-to-1 return on investment through lower premiums from a more balanced risk pool.

By refusing to adequately promote open enrollment, the administration is forcing our insurance markets to miss out on an opportunity to improve the markets, to lower premiums for consumers, and to ensure a healthy health insurance market—no pun intended—throughout this country.

That is why I introduced the MORE Health Education Act—to restore those health insurance marketplace advertising dollars and to increase outreach funding back to the \$100 million a year. My bill would also prohibit the administration from using any of these funds to promote short-term plans or junk plans—plans that don’t comply with the Affordable Care Act’s requirements for preexisting condition protections among many other provisions that provide real insurance coverage for people who need it.

The Congressional Budget Office projects that approximately 500,000 more people would enroll in the health insurance marketplace or Medicaid coverage each year as a result of my legislation. That is half a million people who would be insured and be able to better take care of themselves and their families, and they would have access to primary care, to preventive services, and to a wide variety of other services they need and that they would be afforded under the essential health benefits of the Affordable Care Act.

My bill would also result in a reduction in marketplace premiums thanks to the increased enrollment from a more balanced risk pool. It would be a win-win all around.

Mr. President, at this time, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous con-

sent that the HELP Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 455 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Indiana.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 913

Mr. BRAUN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, ObamaCare has failed because it is the classic example of Big Government getting in cahoots with a healthcare industry that is broken. It was doomed to fail because when has Big Government and Big Business ever resulted in something that is going to cost less and be more effective?

Under ObamaCare, decisions are made by the healthcare industry executives and the Federal Government bureaucrats—not patients, not consumers. This program is authorizing millions of dollars we don’t have to prop up a system that is not working. If ObamaCare was working, it would sell itself, but it doesn’t work. Costs continue to rise, and Americans continue to be stuck with the bill.

I believe there are things that ObamaCare does that we should keep. I actually incorporated it into my own business’s plan back before the law required you to do it. I covered preexisting conditions and no cap on coverage. The pillars of ObamaCare—we should all accept that.

When they added keeping kids on there until they are 26, that is fine too. Those ships have sailed. But the Affordable Care Act is not remotely affordable, and it is only going to get worse.

I applaud the Trump administration for doing their due diligence on how healthcare policy changes are going to affect average Americans. They are taking the approach to not go deeper in the hole with something like ObamaCare but to reform the industry by making it competitive, transparent, eliminate the barriers to entry and, yes, encourage the healthcare consumer to get involved in his or her own well-being.

I do believe President Trump is right. The Republicans can be the party of healthcare without involving more government, but we need to do that by putting more power back into the hands of the American people, not ceding total power to government bureaucrats and big healthcare executives.

I have a better idea. The truth in pricing act—my bill I am countering with—encapsulates some of the ideas behind the proposed and final rules announced by the White House last week, which I fully support. The complex, opaque nature of healthcare pricing makes it difficult for consumers to anticipate, measure, and compare healthcare costs and coverage options.