

of course. And I don't think it is beneficial to these negotiations. But the fact that the President is saying this and saying, well, you Republicans want to hurt Medicare, for example, I find to be quite ironic—extraordinarily ironic—maybe even a tad hypocritical.

In Washington, DC, you have to watch what people do, not what they say.

In the waning days of the last Congress—once again, watching what people do, not what they say—President Biden, who has accused Members of my party of wanting to hurt Medicare, tried to cut Medicare himself.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services—CMS, as we call it, as you know—every year proposes what is called a physician's fee schedule for doctors who treat Medicare patients. If you are a doctor and you have a Medicare patient, you don't get to send the Federal Government a bill for whatever you think your services are worth. That is not the way it works.

Medicare, every year, through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services—CMS—every year proposes a physician fee schedule. They tell the physicians that this is what you can charge and not a penny more.

President Biden's CMS, last year, proposed to cut all physician payments, all provider payments by 4.5 percent. He didn't want to lift up Medicare; he wanted to cut it—not Republicans, the President.

Now, why is that important?

Well, a lot of physicians won't take Medicare anymore because they say—and they won't take Medicaid either, for that matter. They say: We just can't. We can't turn a profit. We are not looking to make, say the physicians, obscene profits, but we are in the middle of inflation. Healthcare inflation is as real as anything else. We are paying more in rent. We are paying more for our nurses. We are paying more for supplies. And the Medicare fees that we are paying to treat folks on Medicaid and Medicare, they are not keeping up. They are just not.

And so here comes President Biden, through his Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, CMS—here comes President Biden, the champion of Medicare, he proposed a 4.5-percent across-the-board cut for every physician treating Medicare in America. That is 900,000 people in my State.

So I am sitting there listening to this, hearing the President say: All the Republicans want to do is hurt Medicare, on the left hand, but on the right hand he is trying to cut all the physicians and other providers in the program—we have 900,000 people in my State in the program—by 4.5 percent in the middle of rising inflation. I just found that extraordinary. Watch what people do, not what they say.

So I introduced a bill. The name of my bill was Protecting Medicare Patients and Physicians Act. It would have eliminated—it would have eliminated that 4- to 4.5-percent cut that

President Biden wanted to impose on Medicare doctors. I came to the body of this Senate to present that bill. And I didn't come to my colleagues with a problem; I came with a solution. I wasn't going to say: Well, let's just don't cut Medicare doctors and eliminate the cut. I said let's do eliminate the cut, but I have a way to pay for it. I am not suggesting that we reject President Biden's attempt to cut Medicare and fill the hole by borrowing the money. I said, I have got a solution.

I found \$9.8 billion sitting in a fund at the Department of Health and Human Services. It was \$9.8 billion when I was able to get the data. I suspect at one point it got as high as \$15 billion. It was called the Provider Relief Fund. As the President knows, this Congress appropriated lots of money to our healthcare providers to help them deal with COVID, and not all of the money, thankfully, was needed. Many of the healthcare providers returned some of the money. And at the time I presented the bill, there was \$9.8 billion that had been returned and was sitting in an account at the Department of Health and Human Services—way more than enough—way more than enough to prevent a 4-percent and, in some cases, a 4-percent-plus cut to Medicare that President Biden proposed.

I went to every one of my Republican colleagues in the Senate. They all said: We are with you, Kennedy. Let's do it.

So I came to this floor. I came to this floor to ask for unanimous consent, and that, as you know, is where you present a bill, and if nobody objects, it is passed.

But there was an objection, and it came from a good friend and a good man, Senator RON WYDEN, who is chairman of our Finance Committee.

There aren't words in English to express how much I respect RON WYDEN. But Senator WYDEN came to the floor and said: Kennedy, I am going to object to your bill. He said: I don't want you to worry about this. We are aware that President Biden has proposed to cut every Medicare physician in America, but we are not going to let him do that. We are putting together a budget bill right now. We call it the omnibus. We are putting together a budget bill right now that is going to address that problem, and that is why I am objecting to your bill. Your bill, Kennedy, is unnecessary.

Now, I am not blaming this on Chairman WYDEN. I am not. The omnibus passed with a vote of, I think, virtually all, if not all, of my Democratic colleagues and with some Republican colleagues. So I am not saying it is Senator WYDEN's fault. But, after the omnibus passed—I didn't vote for it, in part, because I didn't know what was in it. But, after the omnibus passed, I went back and looked, and lo and behold, the omnibus bill, which passed at the encouragement of President Biden and with a lot more votes from my Democratic friends than my Republican colleagues, had a 2-percent cut

for every provider, every physician, who treats a Medicare patient in America—a 2-percent cut. That is better than a 4-percent cut, but it is still a cut at a time of raging inflation.

Now, I don't know yet what that impact is going to be on healthcare and the healthcare delivery system in my State. I don't know how many more physicians—after President Biden has cut their fees, I don't know how many more physicians are going to stand up and say: I can't take Medicare patients anymore.

I hope none, but I suspect some.

Oh, and let me mention this. I talked about that pool of money, the provider relief fund, that had \$9.8 billion in it—maybe \$15 billion—sitting there in an account, unspent, unappropriated. What happened to it? I don't know. It got spent on something, but it didn't get spent on helping Medicare doctors and patients. They got cut 2 percent.

So I am going to end like I began. In this town, you have to watch what people do, not what they say. The President can try to blame the Republicans and say: Well, they don't want to seriously negotiate about controlling spending and controlling debt. All they want to do is cut Medicare.

He already did it. He did it in December.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak as in morning business and that Senator BENNET be allowed to conclude his remarks before the vote today.

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

ABORTION

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to continue to raise the alarm about how Republicans' extreme, ongoing attacks on reproductive rights are putting women's lives at risk, are trampling the will of the American people, who supported the right to abortion, by the way, everywhere it was on the ballot last November, and are even undermining care for patients in States like mine, which have strong abortion protections.

In fact, right now, a truly extreme lawsuit, which some far-right Republicans in Congress just filed a brief supporting, is seeking to overturn the FDA's longstanding approval of a safe and effective medication used in abortion care. This suit could cause chaos nationwide and rip abortion medication away from patients in every single State, potentially even from my constituents in Washington State.

I have been clear that the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* last year was not the end of the fight to protect reproductive rights. Unfortunately, it was just the starting gun for even more extreme attacks from far-right Republicans. We have already seen 14 extreme State abortion bans go into effect—from bans that set bounties for information about anyone who gets an

abortion or helps to provide one to bans that even lack exceptions for rape and incest and the life and well-being of moms. Some States are even passing new bans to try and get around State courts that block their first ones or laws to get around the fact that their own constituents backed the right to abortion in a statewide vote last year.

Here in Congress, we saw Senate Republicans introduce a national abortion ban last year, and it was one of the first things the Republican House voted on this year. We are still seeing new, appalling proposals from extreme Republicans across the country.

While Republicans here in Congress blocked our bill to make sure doctors cannot be jailed for providing an abortion, Republican State legislators have drafted bills to make sure women can be prosecuted for getting an abortion.

While Republicans in Congress blocked our bill to protect the right to travel across State lines for an abortion, State lawmakers have bills to stop employers from helping employees travel for an abortion.

Right next door to my home State, there is a bill in Idaho that could lead to parents and grandparents being charged with human trafficking for helping minors travel out of State so they can get an abortion. That is appalling.

Republican politicians have investigated a doctor for providing care to a child who was raped. They have proposed funding to jail people for abortions. They have talked about using existing child endangerment laws to prosecute women who use abortion pills. They have made it harder for patients to get birth control and even the treatments they need for life-threatening illnesses, like cancer.

There are Republican attorneys general suing, right now, because the Biden administration told pharmacists they can't discriminate against pregnant patients and because the administration reminded care providers that, when a woman's life is at stake, they are required by Federal law to provide the necessary care, and that includes abortion.

Then there is the case I mentioned earlier, whereby a far-right group is trying, right now, to ban mifepristone, an important abortion medication, nationwide, and I mean all across the country, including in my home State of Washington and in every other State that has strong protections for abortion. There are 22 Republican attorneys general and 67 Republicans right here in Congress who have filed briefs in support of that outlandish lawsuit.

Now, let's be clear about what is going on here. In this lawsuit, these far-right extremists are asking one district judge to overrule the FDA's experts and rulemaking authority in order to undermine healthcare for patients nationwide by declaring a drug that was approved over 20 years ago as unsafe.

Let's set the record straight right now because there has been so much

misinformation on this, including from Republican Members of Congress.

Mifepristone is safe, and it is effective for ending a pregnancy during the first 10 weeks. The FDA determined that decades ago. The science is done. The results are in. They have been for over 20 years. Mifepristone is safe. This lawsuit is not about science; it is about ideology. It is not about protecting women; it is about controlling their bodies.

The reality of what extreme Republicans have already caused with their abhorrent bans is a nightmare. Because of Republican bans, women facing miscarriages have already been unable to get the care they need for days on end. They have already been left bleeding, getting sicker and sicker, and pleading for help. Doctors are already being forced to compromise medical care, leave patients in pain, and even forgo providing lifesaving care because they fear far-right politicians will jail them for doing their job. Abortion providers in States like mine are already overworked, overbooked, and overwhelmed with patients who have had to wait weeks and travel hundreds of miles to get an abortion because of Republican bans. This lawsuit will make things much worse.

Mifepristone is used in over half of the abortions. Taking that drug away would mean fewer options for women, longer waits for people who are seeking care, stress for patients and providers, and chaos for a healthcare system that Republicans have already put in crisis.

It is cruel and utterly unnecessary. There is no reason for this.

You don't have to take my word for this, by the way. Listen to doctors and patients, and listen to women, because that is exactly what I have been doing.

I am not going to stop. I am going to continue to make sure their stories are being heard, especially when they are hard stories to hear, because we will not be quiet. I am going to continue to be their voice and vote here in the Senate, and I am going to keep putting a spotlight on their concerns and on the threats to their health, like these extreme abortion bans and ideology abortion lawsuits. I am going to be here, raising the alarm, fighting to pass commonsense legislation to protect our rights, being a firewall against extreme Republican attacks against abortion, and working, meanwhile, to build the support we need to restore Roe once and for all.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, before I speak on what brings me to the floor, let me thank Chair MURRAY for her incredible advocacy on behalf of not just the women of her State and not just the women of my State but of women and their families all across the United States of America. I want to say how grateful I am.

Thank you.

SPACE COMMAND

Mr. President, we have had, over the last 10 days or so, or 2 weeks or so, in the Senate, briefing after briefing that our constituents never get the chance to see. These are briefings by the intelligence community, by the Department of Defense, about what the nature of the global threat is to the United States and the state of our national security—what they call the net effect between where we are as a strategic force and where our competitors are as strategic forces.

Without revealing anything that I have heard in any of those classified sessions, either in those sessions or as a member of the Intelligence Committee, I can tell you that I have found these briefings to be very sobering over the years. I would be surprised if there isn't a single Member of the Senate who doesn't feel the same way as I do. We have our work cut out for us. It is time for us to move from a 20th century mindset when it comes to our national defense and to our national security to a 21st century mindset. That is not going to be easy. We are going to have a lot of choices to make as a body to do that, but I am confident we will do it.

One of the places we have a lot of ground to cover is in space. My colleague from Colorado is on the floor this evening. I am very glad that he is here because he was the Governor of Colorado, and he knows this issue as well as anybody in this Chamber, and I have seen it from the Intelligence Committee.

You know, I deeply regret the fact that, for many years, among other things, we have enabled the Chinese—in particular, Beijing, and I should say it specifically—to steal a lot of our technology to be able to benefit their national security in the space race that we have. So I am really focused on this because we have had, based in Colorado for many years, something called a Space Command, which is the unified combatant control for space in the United States of America. The home has been in Colorado, and it has always been in Colorado.

I am not going to bore you with one of the saddest stories that I know about a process run completely awry that resulted in the top generals in the Air Force walking into the White House with a recommendation that said we ought to leave the Space Command in Colorado. By the way, the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force in the Trump administration was part of making that recommendation to the last White House. They walked into that White House with, as I said, the recommendation that it stay at the Peterson Air Force Base—now the Peterson Space Force Base—in Colorado.

There were three principal reasons they were arguing that it should stay there. One was that it would reach full operational capability in Colorado faster than if it were moved anywhere else,