

Biden for the counties impacted by severe weather and flooding. Senator CRUZ and I have been in communication with the administration to emphasize how critical these resources are, and we have urged the President to grant the Governor's request for all of the affected counties. Many counties are still waiting for that critical declaration, and I urge the administration to move expeditiously to grant those requests as soon as possible to unlock critical assistance. I appreciate the Biden administration working with us to support these counties and these constituents who were impacted by the recent string of storms.

There is a lot of partisan disagreement here in Washington, DC, that underpins what we do day to day, but those divisions have never extended to critical emergency relief.

With the start of hurricane season officially upon us and experts predicting an active season, I know I join all Texans in hoping for an expeditious recovery for impacted communities.

MEMORIAL DAY

Madam President, as I was able to travel around the State and dodge the severe weather that seemed to pop up instantaneously, I was able to spend time with many of my constituents. For example, I kicked off the week in San Antonio at my favorite annual event. It is where all of the students who have been admitted to service academies gather with their parents and are sent off to their service academy with a rousing speech and best wishes by everyone there.

We had VADM Joe Maguire provide a speech—somebody who was 36 years in the Navy SEALs and now is the director of the Clements Center in Austin, TX, working with the Strauss Center and other University of Texas institutions to try to help educate the next generation of our Nation's leaders.

My office hosts this Memorial Day event to celebrate young Texans who will attend military service academies, and this year, we had the joy of hosting more than 100 students, plus their families and friends, along with several elected officials, community leaders, and representatives from various veterans groups. As I mentioned, our keynote speaker was VADM Joe Maguire.

As we honor the lives of those who died in service to our country, it is very powerful to celebrate the next generation of leaders who are committed to protecting their Nation. These are some of the smartest and most accomplished young people in the country, and they have chosen to pursue their education at our service academies, but they made the decision to take their talents to these service academies and pursue an honorable career that will be full of challenges and sacrifices. They could have gone to some elite school in the Northeast, with the hopes of making millions of dollars over their lifetime, but these students have made a different choice—a choice that puts service above self,

and I applaud all of them. It was great to meet with these young men and women because it gives me hope for the future of our country.

I am grateful to the families as well, who were there cheering their students on, who traveled from across Texas to help us celebrate in San Antonio.

I am incredibly proud of these young men and women for answering the call to serve. I wish them the best of luck.

Last week, I also had the chance to spend some time out in West Texas at the Goodfellow Air Force Base near San Angelo, TX. That is one of the principal training sites for our entering airmen, sailors, soldiers, and now the Space Force, called the guardians. All of these folks who are training to become intelligence specialists come to San Angelo for some of their most basic training.

I got a chance to see them in action and learn about how they are evolving their training missions to match the threat of an evolving landscape. I also had a chance to meet with some of the base's senior leaders and recognize some of the incredible servicemembers who were stationed there.

May, of course, was Military Appreciation Month, and it was great to spend some time celebrating some of our country's past, present, and future military leaders last week. These young men and women are the reason the United States continues to be the greatest, most powerful country on Earth, and they deserve our deepest gratitude for their enduring commitment.

Texas is the proud home to many servicemembers and veterans and their families, and it also serves as a home to the facilities that produce the equipment and the ammunition they use on the battlefield. From F-35 Joint Strike Fighters in Fort Worth to the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, which assembles, disassembles, and evaluates nuclear weapons, we have many of these sites located throughout the State.

Last week, I had a chance to visit the newest addition to Texas's defense industry. General Dynamics just opened its new heavy artillery manufacturing facility in Mesquite, just outside of Dallas. This facility will increase production of 155-millimeter shells, which are crucial to Ukraine's defense against Russia and our preparation for other conflicts around the world. This new factory will expand domestic manufacturing to produce more than 30,000 shells each month, which amounts to one-third of all U.S. production of 155-millimeter artillery shells.

One of the things that the war in Ukraine has exposed is our defense industrial base, which has not been prepared to meet the needs and demands not only of the United States but also of our friends and allies around the world. This is the first new ammunition plant since the start of the Ukraine war, and I am glad that investment was made in the Lone Star State.

Texas is critical to America's national security, and it was good to spend time with the Secretary of the Army, Christine Wormuth, seeing the incredible work being done to support our Nation's security as well as our friends and allies around the world.

My final stop last week on my across-the-State travels was the new Driscoll Children's Hospital in the Rio Grande Valley. Until recently, many families had to travel 150 miles just to receive the specialized care their children needed. With the opening of this new, state-of-the-art facility, that has finally changed. This hospital offers nearly 150 patient beds, 8 operating rooms, sophisticated technology, and even a therapy dog by the name of "Tesla." This is the type of facility that is life-changing for countless families in the region, and I was glad to join elected officials and community leaders to celebrate the newest addition to healthcare delivery in the Rio Grande Valley.

Madam President, it was a busy week in Texas. We have 254 counties. As I like to tell people, it is closer to the Pacific Ocean from El Paso than it is from El Paso, far west Texas, to the eastern tip of our State. Everybody knows Texas is a big place, and I can attest to that again after my travels this last week.

I am grateful to many of my constituents and friends who shared their ideas and feedback with me. It is amazing how different their agenda and their priorities are from what we hear emanating from Washington, DC.

It is the honor of a lifetime to serve 30 million Texans in the U.S. Senate, and I am ready to get back to work.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INDEPENDENT AND COMMUNITY PHARMACIES

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I am here on the Senate floor today to call attention to my colleagues. I want them to recognize—and, really, Americans to recognize—the significant crisis that is happening not only in my home State of Kansas but across the country. All of us face this in our home States. The independent and community pharmacies in our Nation have been struggling for years to survive, and their situation, unfortunately, is deteriorating rapidly.

Independent and community pharmacies play an invaluable role in the healthcare of our country and especially in rural communities, like those in my home State. For many Americans, the local pharmacist is not just a convenient healthcare provider, but it is also someone with whom they feel

most comfortable in receiving medical advice.

I remember my dad, into his nineties, declined to go see the doctor because he knew they would find something wrong with him. But when he had a cup of coffee at the drugstore, he talked with the pharmacist, who provided him with healthcare, occasionally putting a blood pressure cuff on his arm and suggesting to my dad: Ray, you need to go to the doctor.

They are really important people in our communities, and they are highly trusted; and their advice is invaluable as we try to make certain that all Americans are more healthy. Local pharmacists know their patients, their health situations, and even their families, as is the norm in tight-knit rural communities.

The service occurring at a local pharmacy is not simply one for physical medication but offers the relational aspect so often missing in today's healthcare system and, in fact, in today's world. Community pharmacies do not just dispense medications. They build relationships with their patients, and they offer a familiar face and trusted adviser, extending value far beyond their role as just a provider of medication and prescription drugs, although that is their profession.

But despite their irreplaceable role in America's rural communities, from 2003 to 2021, the number of independently owned retail pharmacies declined in rural areas by 16 percent. Through the COVID pandemic and in its aftermath, local pharmacies have been hit hard by the same difficulties our entire healthcare system and infrastructure are facing: high inflation, nonexistent workforce, and supply chain shortages.

However, in addition to these factors experienced by many, pharmacies face additional significant challenges that threaten their solvency and are forcing an increasing number of independent and community pharmacies to close. The growing challenges with the 340B Drug Pricing Program and actions of participating manufacturers are reducing the revenues for contract pharmacies. While 340B was created to ensure low-income and uninsured patients have access to discounted drugs, pharmacies have relied upon the program for revenue via contract pharmacy arrangements, a policy that Congress ought to codify within the 340B statute.

Another factor is the actions of pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs. We have three committees in the U.S. Senate, all which have passed legislation dealing with PBMs, but none of those pieces of legislation has come to the Senate floor—PBMs that, unlike any other sector of the healthcare industry, have operated without oversight and regulation for years.

The obscurity of their industry allows PBMs to argue that they are helping to keep prescription costs lower for patients while ensuring a higher reimbursement for pharmacies. Recent

studies, investigations, and real-life experiences of our independent and community pharmacies and their patients tell us the exact opposite is true.

I hear this from my pharmacists across Kansas. It used to be, early in my days in the U.S. Senate and even in Congress, that the gathering place in the community and a nice enjoyable place to visit was the community pharmacy, the community's drugstore. Today, if you enter the drugstore as an elected official, you will hear the difficulties those pharmacists are facing in their profession and in their business. Part of that is the story of PBMs and the PBMs' clawbacks from reimbursements already made to the pharmacists, rebates that did not reach patients and went instead to the PBMs. Vertical integration and unfavorable terms offered to 340B contract pharmacies have become increasingly frequent and the common practice of PBMs.

In addition to actions taken by the PBMs, local pharmacies also recently have been forced out of or are unable to serve TRICARE beneficiaries. Two years ago, TRICARE began a new contract with Express Scripts, the subsidiary owned by Cigna. The new Express Scripts contract offered to interested pharmacy participants offered reimbursement rates that were far too low for many of our pharmacies or pharmacists to accept. The pharmacists did not have the ability to negotiate the reimbursement rates with Express Scripts. It was a "take it or leave it."

Without negotiations and unable to afford the offered reimbursement rates, countless numbers of local pharmacies in Kansas could not participate in the new TRICARE network with Express Scripts. In addition to the community pharmacies' desire to serve veterans, Active-Duty military members, and their families, the costs associated with TRICARE prevented them from doing so.

When the costs of acquiring and dispensing a drug are higher than the reimbursement rates, a business—a pharmacy—simply cannot make that math work and stay solvent. Yet we continue to ask our community pharmacists across the Nation to do that each and every year, to make that situation work year after year.

While perhaps you can get by for a year or maybe two, you can't get by year after year after year. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Nation's independent and community pharmacies are facing a crisis, and if Congress does not act, a significant number of local pharmacies will be forced to close. We frequently discuss the high rate of rural hospital closures, but rarely do we ever discuss the parallel crisis of losing rural pharmacies at this increasingly alarming rate.

I am told by the Kansas Pharmacists Association that 32 percent of community pharmacies across the country are considering closing this year. Unfortu-

nately, I know that 32 percent includes a vast number of Kansas pharmacies. As of 2021, Kansas is one of four States with the most counties lacking sufficient access to a pharmacy.

What I am saying is that there is already a problem of access. But with the trend that now presents itself, more and more Kansans—more and more Americans—will have less access or no access to a pharmacy.

Today, many of our healthcare needs are met by prescription drugs, and yet that will not be an option for many Americans.

So often we take for granted the healthcare infrastructure we have in our Nation, from hospitals and community health centers to specialists and pediatricians and primary care practices. No matter where an individual is seeking care, one place that is a common denominator for the entire healthcare system is the pharmacy. Independent and community pharmacies in Kansas and across the Nation are the one place where a patient can go to fill their medication, see a friendly face, and know that local access to care is there for them when they need it.

We are asking for miracles from the community and independent pharmacies to remain solvent through a barrage of unfair situations, none of their own making. They deserve better than what we are asking from them. And just as they offer lifesaving services to Americans, Congress ought to heed the warnings from community pharmacists and offer lifesaving policies and legislation to them.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

TRUMP TRIAL VERDICT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, a Presidential campaign and a political party misreported payments to lawyers as legal expenses and, thus, violated the law.

Now, am I referring to Donald Trump and his trial? No. I am referring to the Democratic National Committee and the Hillary Clinton campaign.

In the 2016 Presidential election cycle, they improperly reported money used to fund the Steele dossier as legal expense, and in doing so, they hid its true purpose, which was opposition research against Trump.

Now, the Federal Election Commission held, 6 years later, that it found probable cause that the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign violated Federal law. They were fined over \$100,000. Were they criminally prosecuted? Of course not.

The now-debunked Steele dossier threw our country into crisis and did it for years. In 2020, Senator JOHNSON of Wisconsin and I were able to get once-classified information declassified.

That declassified information showed that Christopher Steele's sources were, one, connected to the Russian Government; two, supported Hillary Clinton; and, three, that Russian intelligence