

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

was aware of Steele's anti-Trump work even before the FBI started their investigation.

This is information that the Justice Department failed to tell the FISA Court. The Justice Department failed to even apprise the FISA Court that the FBI had a counterintelligence case on one of Steele's key sources. The Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee colluded with the Russians.

They used a former British spy, Fusion GPS, and a law firm to create a fake dossier and then tried to cover it up by misreporting it under the Federal election rules.

This case is referred to as "Crossfire Hurricane." It is a textbook example of government weaponization. It was to get Trump at all costs as they could.

And now that weaponization has moved to the judicial system, our last line of defense against partisan political cancer.

District Attorney Bragg manufactured a crime by reviving a time-barred, State-based misdemeanor for alleging falsifying business records. To revive the alleged crime and elevate it to a felony, he alleged it was done in furtherance of another crime, and he also alleged interference in the 2016 election by Donald Trump.

So what were these extra crimes? Violation of Federal election law, tax law, and other business records. The judge allowed District Attorney Bragg to essentially prosecute alleged Federal violations in State court, but because it was a State court, Bragg couldn't actually charge Trump for those further crimes, which were Federal in nature.

So what an absolute mess and scary precedent this partisan process has created that is going to be a sore on public policy, statutory law, and a precedent to be carried on by other prosecutors in the future.

This was a case that Bragg initially declined to prosecute, just as his predecessor declined to prosecute. And that was a case that Federal prosecutors in the Southern District of New York declined and so, too, and as well did the Federal Election Commission.

Now, that prosecutor in Manhattan that failed to prosecute the same things that Bragg prosecuted was well-respected Cyrus Vance, Jr.

Now, we have Bragg taking up what an outstanding prosecutor by the name of Vance would not do. Even liberal legal analysts have noted that this case wouldn't have been brought against anyone other than Donald Trump.

A State prosecutor has no jurisdiction over a Federal crime, whereas the Justice Department does. And here the Justice Department and the Federal Election Commission have exclusive jurisdiction over these kinds of matters.

The Biden Justice Department didn't do anything to assert its jurisdictional hook as it routinely does when, for ex-

ample, States file lawsuits involving Federal immigration law.

Biden's No. 3 official at the Justice Department, Matthew Colangelo, left that perch to work as a line prosecutor in the Bragg office for this specific prosecution.

Eventually, the "zombie" case against Trump, as it has been described by legal scholars, was revived just in time for the 2024 Presidential election cycle. In fact, the grand jury came out with a verdict less than 2 months after Trump announced for the election.

Then, the judge allowed the jury to pick from not one but three different secondary crimes that I mentioned earlier that Trump allegedly committed to impact the 2016 election. This means that jurors could disagree on the crime. Yet the judge would still consider the verdict unanimous to convict.

As Andrew McCarthy said in his June 1, 2024, article, "The jurors were told that they needn't agree on what unlawful conduct Trump had engaged in to conspire to corrupt the election (which remember was not charged in the indictment.)"

This is a judge who repeatedly contributed to a group "dedicated to resisting the Republican Party and Donald Trump's radical right-wing legacy."

And McCarthy wrote in his article, "How can there be guilt beyond a reasonable doubt if the jury doesn't agree on whether prosecutors have proved a key element of the case?"

I could go on and on about the defects in this political persecution. What concerns me most is the damage that is done to our American institutions.

Federal law enforcement, the intelligence community, and now the judicial branch have contorted themselves in ways unimaginable just to try and, at the same time, destroy Trump. In the process, they have broken faith with the laws, with the rules, with ethics, with the truth, and with the American people.

The steel and concrete foundations of our law enforcement and the judicial institutions are breaking apart, piece by piece, bit by bit. It is not the American people who are doing it. It is those charged with running those institutions who are responsible for their shockingly quick decline.

That decline won't stop anytime soon so long as the left and their allies in the media continue to use the judicial system to destroy their enemies based upon make-believe cases.

The leftwing's lawfare crusade has given them what they wanted for a decade now: Donald Trump's conviction on something, anything, just a conviction.

But what the leftwing has failed to foresee is the aftermath of their injecting partisan political cancer into our once storied institutions; that is, they run the catastrophic risk of the American people not caring anymore. Did the Justice Department indict someone on major criminal charges? Well, many

people may react with doubt about the merits and the integrity of that indictment because of the Justice Department's past political decisions.

Did the FBI arrest a major criminal? Well, many people may begin to question whether the person arrested is now a part of a political persecution based on made-up information like what happened with the FISA Court and Crossfire Hurricane and everything involving Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election.

A Democratic judge and prosecution team tried and convicted a Republican in a district that is almost 90 percent Democratic voters. They asked for going to someplace else where they might get a more fair trial, and they got a quick no.

So I hope you get the picture. That is why millions of Americans refuse to take this sham conviction very seriously. Trust is easy to lose, and trust is hard to gain.

Andrew McCarthy stated in his excellent analysis:

What happened in Manhattan was monstrous. The fallout is the antithesis of a constitutional republic that presumes innocence, imposes the burden of proof on the state, venerates its due-process rules, and guarantees equal protection of the law. The antithesis is now the norm. Regardless of what happens to Donald Trump, all of us will live to regret it.

Ultimately, only "We the People" can solve the constitutional crisis that politicians, law enforcement, and judicial officers have disgracefully created.

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. WHITEHOUSE. 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.

The Senator from Rhode Island.

U.S. SUPREME COURT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, as the presiding officer knows, I have come regularly to the floor to discuss multiple aspects of the scheme run by a bunch of rightwing billionaires to capture and control the Supreme Court and how that has come to affect so many Americans' lives.

Well, in case there were not enough ethics problems already at the Supreme Court after the billionaire gift program for certain Justices gave them luxurious, free, undisclosed travel gifts around the world, paid for homes for parents, education for dependents, and even an expensive motor coach that appears never to have had the principal repaid.

Now we know that MAGA battle flags were flown over the Alito residences. We don't know all the facts of what happened. We do know that Alito's version of events differs from corroborated statements of other witnesses to