

Government negotiated—just like the Veterans Health Administration in the United States—for reasonable prices for Canadian citizens. Now we are doing the same thing. Finally, after decades of promise, it is happening. This notion that the top 10 drugs under Medicare are now going to be negotiated so that we can bring prices within reach of the government and individuals is simply an extension of what we have been doing at the VA for years. I have to tell you it makes a difference, a serious difference.

Imagine that the Biden-Harris proposal not only allows for negotiating prices down to a reasonable level for Medicare, but it also says that you in Medicare are limited to a \$2,000 annual expenditure for prescription drugs. And \$2,000 is a lot of money. Don't get me wrong. For a lot of people, it is a hardship to come up with that kind of money, but it is within the reach for most Americans to pay that amount of money. We know that drugs, otherwise, are too darned expensive for them.

Now, the critics of that, like the Senator from Kentucky, this morning, call it socialism. I call it the American approach to helping families—a realistic approach that says that pharmaceutical drugs should be affordable. If I understood the position of the Kentucky Senator this morning, he thinks it is a big mistake. I think it is a breakthrough. Finally, we are going to reach the day when we can negotiate prices for those not in Medicare who will be helped as well. So I wanted to start my remarks with that.

VENEZUELA

Mr. President, in 2018, 6 years ago, I visited Venezuela—a once prosperous, albeit imperfect, democracy suffering terrible economic and political decline.

As we drove around the streets of Caracas, the person from the Embassy in the car said: Take a look at something you might not notice. Notice the belts that the people of Caracas are wearing, particularly the men, and notice how long the end of the belt is and how many notches they have put in the belt. The people are starving in this country because of the government of Nicolas Maduro.

I told President Maduro at a meeting during that visit that the upcoming election, which was just months away, would only be credible if it was monitored and honest. He went ahead with the discredited election anyway. The result was as predicted: an exodus of millions of desperate people fleeing repression and economic collapse.

A few weeks ago, Venezuela held another Presidential election in which the regime had arbitrarily blocked key opposition candidates from the ballot and had tried to undermine the preelectoral process. This is an indication of what activities are going on. Venezuelan opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez eventually left the country, even though it was pretty clear from the results that we were able to glean from the Venezuelan elec-

tion that he was the winner. Ten million Venezuelans peacefully had voted. Results that were meticulously documented by credible monitors showed an overall win for this opposition candidate. Despite this, the Maduro regime refused to release the results and announced that they had won instead. It arbitrarily arrested thousands of opposition supporters and issued an outrageous warrant for the arrest of Gonzalez, forcing him to leave the country.

Enough of this madness. Enough of this outright theft of the Venezuelan voters' overwhelming choice for a better future. This week, I have introduced a simple 2-page bill terminating all U.S. petroleum cooperation and related trade with Venezuela until the legitimate results of the election are respected. I also filed it as an amendment to the annual Defense authorization bill.

The entrenched regime clings to power using oil revenues dependent on U.S. involvement. Under my bill, that is going to end and so will Maduro's financial strength. It is simply that simple. Are we going to do business as usual with a dictator who ignores the results of a freely held election?

I also appealed to our democratic allies in the region, including the democracies of the Caribbean, to stand resolute in the defense of a sweeping and clear vote by the Venezuelan people. They cannot sit idly by for another 6 years amidst regime-inflicted suffering and economic collapse in Venezuela. Our neighbors in Venezuela deserve better.

JUDICIAL CONFIRMATIONS

Mr. President, on a separate topic, over the past 3 years, something profound has happened on the floor of the Senate. We have been building on the most important accomplishments of the Biden-Harris administration: the confirmations of highly qualified, independent, even-handed judges to the Federal bench.

To date, we have confirmed 208 judges to lifetime positions on the Federal judiciary during my time as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee over the last 3½ years. This is progress. We have stayed on pace with the number of judges confirmed during the Trump administration, even though we have had the longest evenly divided Senate in history. We now only have a narrow majority of 51 to 49.

These confirmations highlight the Senate Judiciary Committee's and Biden-Harris administration's commitment to filling vacancies with highly qualified, diverse candidates who will ensure the fair administration of justice. This is a historic slate of judges we have approved who will rule with reason and restraint. They respect the rule of law, adhere to precedent, and answer only to the Constitution.

I have served on the Senate Judiciary Committee for more than two decades, including as chair for the past 3½ years. During that time, I have evaluated and voted on more than 1,000 judi-

cial nominees. The record is clear: President Biden's nominees to the Federal bench represent the best. Every single one—every single one—of the President's 208 judges so far has received at least a “qualified” rating from the American Bar Association, an indication that their peers found them to be high in integrity, professional competence, and judicial temperament.

Something that also stands out about President Biden's nominees, aside from their exceptional qualifications, is the professional and demographic diversity they bring. We have made history on the Senate Judiciary Committee and in the Senate in confirming more Black women to the Federal circuit courts than all of the previous Presidents of the United States combined. Of course, we have confirmed the first-ever Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson.

With Hispanic Heritage Month beginning this weekend, I would like to celebrate the historic nature of the Hispanic and Latino judges whom President Biden has nominated and we have approved. Just this week, we confirmed Jeannette Vargas to the Southern District of New York. During the Biden administration, the Senate has confirmed 37 Hispanic judges, more than any other President in history. President Biden also has appointed historic firsts to the bench, including the first-ever Hispanic judge to sit on the DC Circuit and the first Latina to sit on the Fifth. In my home State, Judge Nancy Maldonado became Illinois' first Latina Federal judge and, more recently, the first-ever Hispanic judge to serve on the Seventh Circuit.

Beyond this demographic diversity, there is recordbreaking professional diversity. In the past 3 years, we have confirmed more public defenders and circuit judges than all prior Presidents combined. There is nothing wrong with a former prosecutor being a Federal judge. I have voted for dozens of them, and I am sure they are competent in doing a good job. But if we want balance on the bench, we should make sure that we have diversity in professional background.

Another notable aspect of this record is that the vast majority—nearly 90 percent—of the Federal judges approved during the Biden administration have been bipartisan. This includes three-quarters of the appellate nominees. I want to thank my several Republican colleagues who have joined us in good faith to make this happen.

This focus on qualified, consensus nominees will go a long way to restoring trust in the judiciary. The American people want judges who look like America and understand the American experience in all of its forms. We will continue elevating judges who are qualified, principled, and committed—above all—to faithfully following the Constitution. The American people deserve nothing less.

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. THUNE. Mr. 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.

AUGUST WORK PERIOD

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, like many of our colleagues, I spend a lot of summer days on the road in my home State of South Dakota. The longer summer recesses give me the opportunity to travel the State far and wide, and with so much going on in South Dakota during the season, it is a great time for me to see familiar faces and to meet new folks as well.

I spend a lot of these summer days listening because what I hear from South Dakotans informs a lot of the work that I do here in the U.S. Senate.

In Howard, SD, I heard from healthcare professionals about some of the important programs that help them provide healthcare in rural areas.

Homebuilders in the Sioux Falls area told me about the headwinds they face from the Biden-Harris administration's overregulation, which has made building new homes more difficult and expensive.

At a Dakotafest in Mitchell, agricultural producers expressed their frustration that Congress has still not passed an updated farm bill—a frustration that I share. I have been pushing hard for Congress to take up a bill and will continue to do everything I can to advance this legislation. Another extension is no substitute for the certainty an updated farm bill would give farmers and ranchers as they make plans for the future, and getting it done should be a priority for Congress.

Traveling around South Dakota also gives me the chance to meet the people who keep our communities going.

I dropped in to hear from local officials in Leola and Eureka.

I got to learn about some of the things happening at Black Hills State University, and I toured South Dakota State's nursing simulation center in Brookings.

I visited the Liberty Center in Box Elder and saw the great work the Black Hills community does to make the area a welcoming place for service-members stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base and for their families.

Whether it is Kuchen in Eureka, a quick bite at Ricky's Restaurant in Roscoe, or, of course, the Tubby Burger at the Brown County Fair, I know I can always find some good food to keep me fueled wherever I am traveling in South Dakota.

What would the summer be without a few celebrations? I was out in Rapid City for the annual Military Appreciation Barbecue, I joined the Fort Pierre 4th of July Parade, and I was back in my hometown of Murdo celebrating the 70th anniversary of the legendary Pio-

neer Auto Show and honoring the life of longtime museum owner Dave Geisler, who passed away earlier this year.

I had the opportunity to travel with my family in the Black Hills. We made stops in Spearfish Canyon, Hill City, Keystone, Lake Pactola, and Spearfish, among other places.

This summer was also notable for the successes of South Dakota's athletes. It was great to see two South Dakotans competing in the Olympics and Paralympics this year. Sioux Falls native Taryn Kloth competed in beach volleyball, and Miles Krajewski, a Yankton native and freshman at the University of South Dakota, made history as the first American to medal in badminton at the Paralympics, bringing home a silver medal in mixed doubles.

The Sioux Falls Little League All Star Team made it to the Little League World Series this summer, and by all accounts, they played well in Williamsport. They should be proud of their success, and I am glad to hear they were able to befriend fellow players from across the country and the world along the way.

It was great to be in Brookings this past weekend for the South Dakota State Jackrabbits' home opener, as they look to defend their back-to-back national titles this season.

Summer is a wonderful time in South Dakota, and it is a privilege to be able to spend part of it exploring our great State. The sunshine on the open prairie, the smell of the ponderosa pine, and the good people I meet along the way remind me how lucky I am to be a South Dakotan and what an honor it is to represent this special place in the U.S. Senate.

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

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

DISASTER RELIEF FUNDING

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, Congress has one task over the next 2 weeks, and it is relatively straightforward: to keep the government open and avoid a pointless and costly shutdown that would hurt most Americans. And as we do that, there is one priority that we can't afford to neglect or punt, and that is providing disaster aid to communities across the country that are still waiting.

All across our country, in more than 20 States and territories, millions of Americans are reeling from disasters: wildfires, hurricanes, droughts, floods. And having lost their homes, their communities, their livelihoods, they count on the Federal Government to help.

For people on Maui, help is needed immediately. More than a year after the deadly fires that leveled an entire town, claimed 102 lives, and stole just about everything from those lucky enough to survive, nothing is normal yet. Survivors in temporary housing are being forced to move every few months. Many have moved five times in the last year, shattering any semblance of stability that they have been able to cobble together. Meanwhile, not a single home has been rebuilt so far. Not a single home has been rebuilt so far. That is a dire emergency for any community in any scenario, but it is especially worrying given that temporary housing assistance from FEMA is due to expire in 5 months.

The long and difficult recovery is squeezing survivors in other ways as well. With fewer jobs and smaller paychecks, people are having to figure out whether they can afford the most basic necessities. A recent poll of Maui wildfire victims found that 70 percent of survivors are cutting back on food and groceries—70 percent cutting back on food in the United States of America—and more than half are cutting back on medicine and other healthcare expenses.

So it is no surprise that people whose families have lived on Maui for generations are considering giving up and leaving the island altogether. And worse, thousands more are on the cusp of doing the same. For Lahaina to fully recover, it needs its people. For Lahaina to recover, it needs its people. And what those people need right now is tangible help—help with building a home, with finding a job, help with rebuilding their small businesses—the kind of help that will finally provide a reprieve from the constant worrying about what is next and hope that a better future awaits them after months of unimaginable suffering.

Providing that kind of help and relief to our fellow Americans in their hour of need is central to the promise of the Federal Government. There are not that many things that the Federal Government absolutely must do. There are not that many things that the Federal Government absolutely must do, but one of them is, when there is a disaster and a State or a county or an island or a reservation or a town is devastated by a natural disaster and the impact of that natural disaster exceeds the ability for that local unit of government to handle it, the President declares a disaster. And then FEMA comes in.

After that, HUD comes in with the support of the Congress through a program called Community Development Block Grants-Disaster Recovery. What does that mean? It is flexible funding for those communities to rebuild. FEMA came to the table and did the disaster response. Now we have to recover. People are not recovered. People are not recovered.

So we have an opportunity not to do something extraordinary but to do