

just help them. It is about whether we as a country honor our promise that every American deserves independence, dignity, and security.

Medicare and Medicaid are overwhelmingly popular with Americans and overwhelmingly needed by Americans. It is about caring for one another. It is about ensuring that every American can live with peace of mind and have dignity—dignity—in their senior years and strengthening health and prosperity in every corner of our country.

On this 60th anniversary, we should be strengthening these lifelines, not dismantling them.

As a nation, we have already made progress—capping out-of-pocket drug costs with the last administration; passing my bill to empower Medicare to finally negotiate drug prices—if this administration will continue this program that already, for the first 10 drugs, saved billions of dollars; making healthcare affordable; saving families thousands of dollars on therapies and hospital stays for complex illnesses.

Yet, today, on this milestone anniversary, we are again called to defend the very promise that began in Independence, MO, 60 years ago.

To paraphrase Minnesota's Happy Warrior Hubert Humphrey, who was there with President Johnson when he served as Vice President after he was Senator from the great State of Minnesota—he once said this: The moral test of a government isn't just how it treats the young and healthy; it is also how it treats the sick, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

That is definitely true for government, and I believe it is a moral test for all Americans.

I urge my colleagues, let's protect the health and security that Medicare and Medicaid provide for Americans of all ages. Let's keep the spirit of Independence alive so every kid, every family, every person, no matter their story, can count on Medicare and Medicaid for generations to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. LUJÁN. Mr. President, I rise today for every American who is scared—scared about losing their health insurance, scared about making ends meet after the passage of the Republican budget betrayal.

This August, my Republican colleagues are going to have to return home, and they are going to have to face their constituents. Let's see how many of them have the courage to hold townhalls and actually have real conversations with their constituents and take real questions.

I hope my Republican colleagues are ready to explain why they gave the ultrawealthy a \$250,000 tax break—you heard that right, a \$250,000 tax break—while gutting Medicaid—a gut punch to people who depend on Medicaid to be able to get the care they need for themselves or for their kids, maybe

some other loved ones; the same Medicaid which helps cover the births of nearly half of America's children.

I hope my Republican colleagues can answer how they can take from veterans, seniors, and children with disabilities just to hand more money to the top 0.1 percent. The top 0.1 percent—they are the wealthiest people in America. They are the ones who were rewarded with the taking of this money.

Meanwhile, Democrats have been listening to our constituents and hosting townhalls—even in Republican-led States—and fighting back against a law that does nothing for working families and everything for the ultrarich.

Senate Democrats are offering Republicans another chance to reverse the devastating cuts they just passed—cuts that will close rural hospitals and decimate Medicaid because Republicans have turned healthcare into a privilege reserved only for the most wealthy in the country.

That is not the way it has always been. Sixty years ago, Democrats and Republicans on this very floor came together to save seniors living in poverty and Americans who were suffering or dying prematurely because they didn't have health insurance and they couldn't see a doctor. This promise our government made to our Nation has saved millions from illness and undue financial burdens.

Senate Republicans broke that promise to the American people. Senate Democrats know that every American needs healthcare to survive.

Back home in New Mexico, families are learning what this law means for their daily lives. Some are already living their worst fears. They are checking their bank accounts. They are calling their doctors. They are trying to refill prescriptions while they still can.

Moms and dads of very sick kids are wondering how they are going to afford care when these cuts go through. One of those moms is Karisa from Las Vegas, NM. Her daughter Aurora was born with a chromosome 16 disorder. She had to have open-heart surgery. She spent her first year alive on oxygen.

Aurora is a fighter, but without Medicaid, Karisa could never have afforded the surgeries that saved Aurora's life. Because of Medicaid, Aurora isn't just surviving; she is thriving. She is going to birthday parties. She is playing on the playground and dancing to her favorite cartoons. That is what the fight is all about.

As Senators, we have the privilege to represent our constituents, but it comes with the responsibility to ensure that families like Karisa's can focus on healing instead of having to focus on the bills they can't afford.

Look, New Mexicans aren't looking for handouts. They work hard. They care for one another. I know it because I have lived it. When I was a kid, we moved in with my grandparents, Celedon and Nestora Luján. I didn't un-

derstand it then, but I understand it now. We lived together because we had to. Now, don't take that wrong—we were also blessed to. It is how families get by in New Mexico.

Medicaid is not a handout; it is a lifeline. Medicaid is American dignity—the dignity of parents focused on caring for their children, not having to argue with an insurance company; the dignity of a senior not having to choose between medicine and groceries.

Earlier this month, Senate Republicans all voted to gut Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act.

I mean, heck, some Senate Republicans are now even introducing legislation to roll back the very Medicaid cuts that they voted for on this floor just 3 weeks ago, trying to cover their tracks.

By the way, these same Senate Republicans all said on this Senate floor in one way or another that they promised they were not going to cut Medicaid. Well, I am tired of saying "Well, it is not completely true" or "Oh, well, they misspoke." No. They lied. And growing up, my father told me that the coverup is worse than the lie. I hope when they go home, they have the courage to face their constituents.

So, Democrats, we are all standing here today to do what is right. Our bill will restore the Affordable Care Act's premium tax credits, which will bring down costs. It will reverse Republican cuts to Medicaid, remove redtape, and prevent the closures of rural hospitals—something I think we all agree on.

So I urge my Republican colleagues, vote for your constituents, vote to save our rural hospitals, and vote to restore dignity to every American.

Let's work together and reverse the damage of the Republican budget betrayal.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be permitted to speak prior to the scheduled votes: DURBIN for up to 15 minutes, COTTON for up to 5 minutes, PATTY MURRAY for up to 5 minutes, and MARK WARNER for up to 5 minutes.

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

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, from time to time, I come to the floor to discuss political prisoners jailed by some of the world's worst regimes. I have often been joined in that effort to secure their release by colleagues on both sides of the aisle, including then-Senator and now-Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

You see, despite periods of retreat on the global stage, the United States is still being seen as a beacon of hope for those who want freedom and democracy, and this American voice has always enjoyed broad bipartisan support.

President Reagan certainly understood this when he famously told the

Soviets to “tear down this wall” at the Brandenburg Gate.

The late-John McCain understood this when he joined thousands of Ukrainians aspiring for freedom on Maidan Square.

President Trump’s Special Envoy Keith Kellogg understood this when he recently secured the release of several Belarusian political prisoners.

My former Senate colleague from Maryland Ben Cardin understood this when he passed the bipartisan Global Magnitsky Act.

Many times, those released from gulags overseas as a result of pressure from this Chamber have even visited me here in Washington, and they note how important it is to be remembered despite their isolation. So today, I want to mention just a few cases that deserve the attention of this Senate.

Let me start with the United Arab Emirates. If you follow soccer or football—depending on your choice of the name of the sport—you will see “Emirates” across the uniforms of some of the most famous, premier league teams. When you think of the Emirates, you think of those teams, and you wonder about the airline, but you may not think twice about human rights.

The United Arab Emirates is where one of that nation’s top human rights defenders, Ahmed Mansoor, has been in prison for 8 years. Mansoor is considered one of the last major human rights voices in the Emirates—one tragically being held at times in solitary confinement, separated from his family. He was arrested under the guise that his social media posts advocating for human rights threatened social harmony.

Despite the dismal conditions of his incarceration, he remains steadfast in his commitment to human rights, even conducting multiple hunger strikes in protest of his jail conditions—the same conditions he spoke out against before his detention. Recently, his outrageous 15-year sentence was upheld on appeal.

We have strong ties and shared interests with the UAE, but its continued involvement in the horrific Sudanese civil war and incarceration of Mr. Mansoor complicate that relationship.

I appeal to UAE President Muhammad bin Zayid Al Nahayyan to show compassion and allow Mr. Mansoor’s release on humanitarian grounds.

To those at the United Arab Emirates Embassy here in Washington, if you are listening to my voice, understand this: We are expecting a positive response for Mr. Mansoor, and we are expecting it soon. If you ignore this entreaty, believe me, many of us will remember.

Next on the list is Azerbaijan. In 2023, anti-corruption research advocate Dr. Gubad Ibadoghlu and his wife were forcibly dragged from their vehicle and severely beaten. He was taken to a prison, well-known for its torture, where he was denied medication and legal representation. What crime did he commit? Investigating and writing

on the rampant corruption stemming from Azerbaijan’s oil and gas industry.

While he was eventually placed under house arrest in April 2024, he has still been denied a trial, legal representation, access to adequate medical care, and his family continues to suffer harassment.

He is one of the many wrongfully detained individuals in Azerbaijan who should be released. If the Azerbaijan Embassy is watching this presentation, we are begging you: Do something to give this man a break, and release him from prison. We will be watching and hope you do.

Next is Tunisia, one of the most promising nations to emerge from the Arab Spring that sadly has seen President Saïed consolidate power and stifle dissent by arresting political opponents and critics. One such case is Sonia Dahmani, a prominent Tunisian lawyer and political commentator who was arrested in May 2024 for her radio and television commentary. She faces five separate legal proceedings and an additional 10 years on pending charges. Her sister Ramla was also sentenced in absentia to 2 years in prison for advocating for her sister’s case on social media.

Ms. Dahmani has endured appalling prison conditions, including sexual assault, and denial of basic medical care. I urge President Saïed to release her on humanitarian charges and drop any remaining charges, including those against her sister.

If you are watching this presentation from the Embassy in Tunisia, believe me, we are begging you to act on this quickly, quickly. Show that you have heard this. Show that you understand the severity of your decision and understand that those of us in Congress and in the Senate will be watching carefully to see your response.

Lastly, two cases in Guatemala, cases new President Arevalo inherited and has bravely tried to solve: the troubling jailing of journalist Jose Ruben Zamora and legal harassment of anti-corruption prosecutor Virginia Laparra. Their incarceration occurred amid multiple efforts to derail the peaceful transition of power to President Arevalo last year. Both were eventually released from the prison to house arrest, but Mr. Zamora has now been sent back to prison, and Ms. Laparra continues to face baseless legal harassment from holdovers from the previous regime. Both deserve full release and dropping of remaining charges.

If the Embassy of Guatemala is following my statement, please respond—and quickly—and give these two people relief. We will be watching carefully and hope that you do.

What we do here matters around the world for the large and small battles occurring for freedom and democracy.

My friend and jailed Russian dissident Vladimir Kara-Murza wrote the following from his Russian gulag a few years ago:

The prisoner’s worst nightmare is the thought of being forgotten. . . . I always knew how true those words were—and how important were international campaigns of solidarity with prisoners of conscience. I now feel it with my own skin.

Let me remind Ahmed, Gubad, Sonia, Jose Ruben, and Virginia, you are not forgotten. Today, as I deliver these remarks, members of the families of some of these people are in the Gallery. Don’t give up hope. I will continue to be that voice to remind the world of the incarceration and treatment of those that you love.

We need to be a beacon of hope in the United States. This is a demonstration, and we are begging these countries that are involved in these incarcerations and treatment to change their approach completely and give these people the freedom that they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The Senator from Arkansas.

NOMINATION OF JOSEPH KENT

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, today, I urge my Senate colleagues to confirm Joe Kent as the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center.

Mr. Kent has 20 years of military service and 11 combat deployments during the War on Terror, as well as experience as a Green Beret and a CIA officer. Mr. Kent has dedicated his career to fighting terrorism and to keeping Americans safe.

For Joe, this mission is both patriotic and, sadly, personal, as his first wife Shannon was tragically killed while serving in Syria in 2019. America remains grateful for and honored by her selfless, valiant service to our Nation, and we continue to hold Joe and their children in our prayers for their loss.

Mr. Kent understands the grave threat that terrorism poses to the security and safety of Americans. He has committed to returning the National Counterterrorism Center to its statutory mission of integrating threat intelligence from foreign terrorist organizations and to getting out of purely domestic activities. These are among the reasons I call on my colleagues to support his nomination.

Finally, in addition to Mr. Kent, I would like to emphasize the urgency with which the Senate ought to confirm nominees to all intelligence and national security-related positions. Getting these nominees through the confirmation pipeline is essential to our national security and crucial to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of our intelligence Agencies.

Again, I am pleased to offer my support for Mr. Kent’s nomination, and I call on my colleagues to do the same.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Clarkson nomination.

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

The Senator from Washington State.