

and gratitude is expressed, but, more than that, to make certain that the services that they provided for our Nation and the freedoms they fought for are recognized in what we do in keeping our promises—our promises that were made to them for their service.

I have met many Vietnam war servicemembers and veterans, and their stories remind me that service does not end when they hang up their uniform. We have an obligation to make certain that their well-being is at the forefront of our efforts and that the promises made are promises kept.

In Kansas and across the country, our Vietnam veterans are still serving—leading local businesses, volunteering at the VA and other veterans service organizations, and assisting the next generation of veterans as they transition into life after service. These veterans continue to give back to their communities and the country they served.

Again, with Veterans Day around the corner, we are also reminded of the importance of keeping those promises to our heroes, whether that means access to quality healthcare, support for mental health challenges, or recognition of the lasting damage exposure to Agent Orange has had on those who served, even after they returned home.

I have had the opportunity to work closely with the Vietnam Veterans of America, a veterans service organization that works to support and promote issues faced by veterans of Vietnam. Their advocacy has been critical in supporting veterans' issues and passing legislation that improves the lives of our veterans.

In 2022, Congress passed the PACT Act, legislation that was years in the making, to help improve care for our Nation's veterans who were negatively impacted by toxic exposure during their service. Since that bill became law, the Department of Veterans Affairs has completed more than 6.4 million toxic exposure health screenings, processed more than 2.7 million PACT Act-related claims, and enrolled more than 700,000 veterans in healthcare. We have made a great deal of progress, but there is still much more work to be done to care for and honor our Vietnam veterans.

I was able to learn firsthand from the Vietnam veterans that I saw at the wall last week about their service, their time in Vietnam, their time in the theater, their time at home, their return, and their opportunity now to come pay respects to those who lost their lives during their service. We were able to see firsthand the memorial built to honor them and those who served alongside them.

I have told this story before. Before the World War II Memorial was completed, I wandered up there and found the Kansas pillar and called my dad at home, a World War II veteran. I left a voicemail. I was lucky. My dad didn't pick up the phone, but I left him a voicemail in Plainville, KS, our home-

town, where I said: Dad, I am at the World War II Memorial. This memorial was built in your honor. And, Dad, I want you to know that I respect you, I thank you for your service, and, Dad, I love you.

Walking back to my office on Capitol Hill, my cell phone rang. It was my dad, who said: Gerald, you left me a voicemail, but I couldn't understand it. Would you repeat it.

I no longer can repeat it to my own father, but today I say what I said to my dad then, I say to those who served our Nation in Vietnam, who served our country in that tumultuous period of time. I say it to them: Thank you. We respect your service. And we love you.

These men are heroes. These women are heroes. And we will never forget them or their service.

To all those who served in Vietnam, we respect you. We thank you for your service. We love you, and welcome home.

RECESS

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the previously scheduled recess begin immediately.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:30 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. BRITT).

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant executive clerk read the nomination of Joshua D. Dunlap, of Maine, to be United States Circuit Judge for the First Circuit.

VOTE ON DUNLAP NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Dunlap nomination?

Mr. PAUL. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER) is necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 604 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Banks	Boozman	Capito
Barrasso	Britt	Cassidy
Blackburn	Budd	Collins

Cornyn	Hyde-Smith	Paul
Cotton	Johnson	Ricketts
Cramer	Justice	Risch
Crapo	Kennedy	Rounds
Cruz	Lankford	Schmitt
Curtis	Lee	Scott (FL)
Daines	Lummis	Scott (SC)
Ernst	Marshall	Sheehy
Fischer	McConnell	Sullivan
Graham	McCormick	Thune
Grassley	Moody	Tuberville
Hagerty	Moran	Wicker
Hawley	Moreno	Young
Hoeben	Mullin	
Husted	Murkowski	

NAYS—46

Alsobrooks	Hirono	Sanders
Baldwin	Kaine	Schatz
Bennet	Kelly	Schiff
Blumenthal	Kim	Schumer
Blunt Rochester	King	Shaheen
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Slotkin
Coons	Lujan	Smith
Cortez Masto	Markey	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Murphy	Warnock
Fetterman	Murray	Warren
Gallago	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Hassan	Peters	Wyden
Heinrich	Reed	
Hickenlooper	Rosen	

NOT VOTING—2

Booker

Tillis

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's actions.

The Senator from Alabama.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session.

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

VETERANS DAY

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Madam President, I would like to think that my State of Alabama is the most patriotic in the country. We stand for the flag, and we honor those who have made freedom possible. That is why it is no surprise that the first-ever Veterans Day celebration was held in Birmingham, AL, in 1947. World War II veteran Raymond Weeks organized a parade to mark National Veterans Day and continued to do so every year until his death in 1985.

It is important to remember all who were willing to sacrifice to keep our country free. That is why every year I come to the Senate floor to recognize some of Alabama's tremendous heroes. Their service did not end when their time in the military did; they have selflessly contributed to their communities long after taking off their military uniforms.

TRIBUTE TO ROY DRINKARD

Madam President, our State is home to nearly half a million veterans, including America's oldest living marine and World War II veteran, my friend Mr. Roy Drinkard of Cullman, AL.

After returning home from the war, Roy rolled up his sleeves to help recruit new businesses to Alabama as

part of the Flying Fifty. He founded Drinkard Chevrolet and later led Drinkard Development, helping shape Cullman into the thriving community it is today.

I was proud to be with Roy earlier this year as he celebrated his 105th birthday. He is still going strong, with no signs of slowing down. Roy remains involved in the First Baptist Church of Cullman and serves on the board of trustees for his alma mater, Troy University.

TRIBUTE TO HARVEY MATHIS

Madam President, Alabama is also home to Army MSG Harvey Mathis of Enterprise, AL. Harvey said that his legacy of military service can be traced all the way back to the Revolutionary War. He retired from the military in 2000 after almost 25 years of service.

Harvey then entered the police academy at the age of 22 so that he can continue to protect and serve as a law enforcement officer. He became a chief investigator, where he helped bring those committing crimes against children to justice.

Harvey also served as part of the Dale County Sheriff's Department and as police chief for the city of Daleville during his 15 years in law enforcement.

Alabama is grateful for those like Harvey who have answered the call to defend Americans against evil at home and abroad.

As we prepare to commemorate Veterans Day this weekend, I will remind us of the quote:

If you want to thank a soldier, be the kind of American worth fighting for.

May we all live worthy of the sacrifices made for all of us.

To all the veterans and their families, we say thank you. May God bless you and continue to bless our great country.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO MANUEL HEART

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to celebrate the achievements and the legacy of Chairman Manuel Heart of Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Chairman Heart is retiring after a long and remarkable, successful career serving the Ute Mountain Ute people. His career spans 27 years on the Tribal council, including 15 years as chair, and will undoubtedly leave thousands of lives better off.

Through his long and storied career, I have had the privilege of working with Chairman Heart, first as Governor and now here as a Senator, and his efforts have been and continue to be remarkable. Over the last few decades, he

charted a path for the Ute Mountain Ute. He struck that delicate balance between preserving and investing in Ute culture and securing more resources by navigating intergovernmental relationships to make sure to deliver for the needs of his community.

He championed investing in better water access and improving the Tribe's health, safety, and education.

Chairman Heart always paired his strong leadership skills with a true entrepreneurial spirit in order to deliver results, to deliver real results.

One great example is the new Kwiayagat Community Academy, which I was lucky enough to visit 2 years ago. We had a wonderful tour, met a lot of the kids, and saw the power of the Ute culture. The academy connects elementary students to their indigenous language and to their traditional culture alongside traditional class work: reading, math.

The chairman led this effort to secure Federal funding to help this project take flight, to get it set up, and to actually make sure it worked. Chairman Heart doesn't just understand the value in investing in our youth, investing in our community, investing in our natural world, he acts on it.

I think I lost a page here, but I am just going to go a little bit off script and just say that in my years in service in Colorado, as a mayor first but then as a Governor, I can think of very few leaders that have been as successful and insightful and as diligent as Chairman Heart. He has always stood up when the time for it called. He has been unshakable in his passion and drive to help Ute people. I know that his deep commitment and his love for the Ute people and for the Ute community is not going to end now as he steps down as chairman. He will continue to be a leader in his community and in the State of Colorado.

We wish him the very best in his retirement, and we want to make sure to thank him for all his dedication and all his service, not just to the Utes but to all Colorado.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

HEALTHCARE

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am proud to begin a series of speakers and to be leading off this bloc of colleagues who are going to talk about an issue that is so much on our minds these days, and actually healthcare is always on our minds. There is a saying: If you don't have your health, you don't have anything. And we are all touched at one point or another in our lives by a healthcare challenge, which

is a euphemism for some kind of sickness or illness or condition—whether it is ourselves or someone in our family—and, inevitably, at some point in our lives, ourselves as the victims of a healthcare crisis. It is only a question of when.

So the reason we have healthcare insurance is because it is only a question of when. We or someone in our family will be struck by an illness that is catastrophic. It is catastrophic in the pain and suffering, the emotional turmoil it can cause. And it is also catastrophic for so many people in the financial impact and sometimes ruin it portends.

That is the reason that healthcare costs are the major cause, the predominant cause, of bankruptcy in this country. Crushing medical debt is not only crippling to those individuals financially whom it impacts but to our entire economy. It is a vulnerability to all of us. That is also why we have insurance because we know that at one point or another—it is only a question of when in life's great healthcare roulette—we will be impacted, and we will have to pay for treatment that may be lifesaving, with technology now so advanced, the chances are better than ever of survival and eventually of productivity. But all of it depends on being able to afford it, to pay for it. That is why we have healthcare insurance.

We also have healthcare insurance because we know that it is only a matter of time, but it is also a matter of emotional fortitude and stability. People can go to bed and sleep at night because they know they have an insurance that will safeguard their nest eggs as well as their health.

We have made advances in this great country. The Affordable Care Act was a major historic step in the direction of making healthcare insurance more affordable and, obviously, Medicare and Medicaid. We still have a long way to go in reducing healthcare costs. Pharmaceutical drugs are still too costly in this country, and the technological advances, as lifesaving as they may be, also create costs that seem to be spiraling upward.

But for millions and millions of Americans, healthcare insurance is now affordable. Even if their employer doesn't provide it, even if they are not old enough to qualify for Medicare, even if they are not, incomewise, qualifying for Medicaid, they can buy insurance in a way that makes it affordable.

In fact, this weekend, open enrollment began for 2026, and countless families who have health insurance for 2025 are going to the website for Access Health CT, or it may be for Utah or Indiana or countless other States across the country, most States, in fact, where this designated time of year, Americans can sign up, adjust, or cancel their health insurance coverage.

As of this Saturday, in Connecticut, families saw firsthand, literally, the disastrous impact of Republican policies on healthcare insurance costs. It

wasn't pretty. What they saw were prices doubling and tripling and maybe even more in what they had to pay. A lot of them said to me—a lot, meaning more than 10 or 20—"I have decided I can't afford it."

Literally, they told me over this past weekend—we are talking Saturday and Sunday—"I just can't afford health insurance."

What I said to them is: Wait. Don't walk away from it yet. We may still succeed in making it affordable if we can extend the healthcare tax credits beyond the end of the year. And you will know that it will be affordable and the insurance companies will adjust those rates so that it is affordable. So don't close the door. Don't make an irrevocable decision.

These kind of premium increases should have been a wake-up call. Yet, unfortunately, this administration continues to callously ignore the needs and interests of the American people.

Let's make no mistake—let me be very blunt—Republicans control the U.S. Senate; they control the House of Representatives; they control the White House; and, in fact, the Supreme Court. This healthcare crisis is happening on their watch. It is on them because they refuse to end needless suffering. In fact, the President recklessly and cruelly is weaponizing hunger by stopping SNAP benefits, despite court orders that the administration must use the emergency contingency fund and other revenues, for example, from tariffs, to fund the SNAP benefits. He said, no, he won't. Even after saying—and I think I am quoting almost exactly—that he will be honored to follow the court's directive.

Magnifying pain to maximize political pressure, that is what he is doing.

But we are standing firm because Americans need healthcare insurance not at some distant point in the future. They can't afford to get sick on Donald Trump's timetable. They need to deal with sickness in the real world—now—real people suffering.

Americans are being buried by the cost not only of that healthcare insurance but what they tell me are the costs of groceries, energy, healthcare, generally, and student loans, grants—so much more.

Instead of working with Democrats, President Trump and Republicans have wasted valuable time blocking every single Democratic effort to lower costs for families. And it includes healthcare insurance, unfortunately. We don't need to imagine the costs anymore. We don't need to hypothesize. They are no longer abstract. Trump's version of healthcare is here and now and it is impacting everyone.

Let me just give you some real-life examples that I have been hearing over the last week or so. A 27-year-old living in Hartford making \$65,000 a year will have healthcare premiums increase from \$375 a month to \$558 a month. You may think, well, that doesn't sound like a lot. But it is a lot if you are that

27-year-old living in Hartford, CT, and you are making just \$65,000 a year in the capital of our State. And he is 27 years old. You believe you are invincible. You have to make that decision, and you kind of figure: You know what? I run 5 miles a day. I stay out until 2 o'clock in the morning. I feel good. Sickness can't happen to me—until it does.

That is a decision, a choice, that 27-year-olds are making to not buy that health insurance. That will increase the cost of healthcare insurance for everyone because when that person gets sick, has to go to the emergency room, doesn't have healthcare insurance, can't cover the debt, it impacts many others as well.

That extra \$200 a month is \$2,400 every year. It makes a world of difference for that young professional who is contending with the rising costs of living in Hartford or elsewhere, potentially working to pay off student debt, and maybe even considering starting a family.

I will give you another really catastrophic, even preposterous, example, but it is real life. A couple in their sixties living in Fairfield, CT, making \$100,000 a year will go from paying \$258—get this—to over \$3,000 for the same plan. These are all, by the way, same coverage, same plan. You just pay more. They are not paying more for additional coverage; no, they are paying over \$2,500 more every month because of the Republican healthcare tax. That is every month.

They are at the other end of the spectrum. They have lived a lot of life. They know people get sick. Nobody is invincible. That 27-year-old is in their rearview mirror. They have seen relatives, friends, neighbors, loved ones. What do they do? Can they afford more than \$3,000 a month for the same plan, \$2,500 more every month? And chances are, they are looking at the end of their earnings period.

I could go on about the impacts. I have plenty of other real-life examples. If you are interested, just give me a call.

These cuts will also impact other States. My colleagues in red States have constituents in those red States where people are going to be hit hard.

I will give you an example from Indiana. There are 350,000 Hoosiers in Indiana enrolled in the ACA Marketplace, and over 260,000 families depend on the enhanced premium tax credit to afford their monthly premiums. Without these credits, a family of four living in Indianapolis making \$129,000 a year will go from paying \$725 a month for the least expensive option to a staggering \$1,347 a month. That is \$600 a month more for healthcare insurance that could be spent on the needs of children, put food on the table, pay for electricity or rent or a mortgage or education—\$600 more every month.

It is staggering for a family of four making \$129,000 a year. They may well make a decision to take the risk, but

that risk will come home to roost at some point for some of those families that may decide to go without it. And if they buy it, they will have to make searing, heart-rending sacrifices to afford it.

In North Carolina, over 975,000 people are enrolled in the ACA Marketplace, and 96 percent of them benefit from the enhanced premium tax credit, which is not unusual for there to be more than 90 percent of everybody enrolled in the ACA Marketplace to depend on these tax credit subsidies. In Connecticut, it is 90 percent.

The reason is quite simply that healthcare insurance is made affordable by the tax credits, but without these credits, 888,000 people will see their out-of-pocket premiums double in North Carolina, which is typical of the United States—in red States and blue States.

You know, the one thing about sickness and illness is that it doesn't really discriminate based on your political beliefs or your partisan affiliation or the color of your State, a red State or a blue State; it is everyone, and it hits everyone hard.

A 60-year-old couple living in Raleigh and making \$85,000 a year currently pays \$89 for the least expensive plan. Without these credits, they are going to be paying \$1,893. That is per month—\$1,893. That is nearly \$2,000. Again, it is the same plan, the same coverage, nothing better—just more money that is charged to people.

Republicans know that these increases are going to crush hard-working Americans. It is ludicrous to expect any American enrolled in one of these plans to have the disposable income to keep their coverage.

This is not a partisan issue. I can't say it often enough. This is about ensuring that every American, regardless of their ZIP Code or their income level or their partisan affiliation, has access to the health insurance coverage they need to guarantee they can live healthy and productive lives.

Medicine now can save lives and put people back to work in a way that would have been unimaginable just 5 or 10 years ago, but it is costly, and American families need the insurance and the assurance that healthcare will be affordable for every one of them.

Republicans are choosing to make Connecticut families, Indiana families, North Carolina families, and families across the country pay more for their healthcare. It is cruel. It is stupid. It is unnecessary.

Open enrollment has begun, but it is not too late to enable people to afford health insurance in the way that we as Americans know they need and deserve to be productive and healthy. So I implore my Republican colleagues to listen to their own constituents, who are telling them: We can't afford these unconscionable, exorbitant health insurance increases. Give us the means to live with the assurance that we will have healthcare insurance to take care of our kids and our families.

Do the right thing for the American people. Come to the table and reinstate these credits, because we are going to stand strong and stand firm on this side of the aisle. We are the bulwark against a wave of premium increases that will surely deluge America economically and morally. We will do everything we can to stop it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague Senator BLUMENTHAL for organizing this floor bloc. I thank the Senator very much, and it is an honor to be part of it.

Most people cannot remember what health insurance was like before the Affordable Care Act. Do you remember when you would go and buy a health insurance plan and they would say: Do you have any preexisting conditions? Have you ever had surgery? Have you ever had a broken bone? Any history of cancer? If so, we are going to exclude that coverage on your policy.

So you ended up with a health insurance policy that would cost a fortune and didn't cover many possibilities, and it also cost a fortune to be treated.

There were many other aspects of health insurance in those days too. Do you know how much mental illness was covered by health insurance? Virtually none. Health insurance did not cover that. Do you know how mental illness was added into the Affordable Care Act? Two Senators—Paul Wellstone of Minnesota and Peter Domenici of New Mexico—insisted on a provision that said that all health insurance plans will cover mental illness and addiction. Thank goodness they included those things because addiction became a major problem across America with the opioid crisis.

In addition, there was the question: What am I going to do with my kids who are going to college? Are they still covered by my family's health insurance plan?

In most instances, the answer was no. Your child coming out of college, who was looking forward to this great future, had no health insurance coverage if they couldn't find a job. We changed that. I think it goes to age 26 now for families so that they are still covered by the family plan.

The things I have just described to you are considered common to health insurance plans. They were not before the Affordable Care Act.

Do you know how many Republicans votes there were for ObamaCare, the Affordable Care Act? None. None. Not one. We passed it because we happened to have 60 votes in the Senate. I was one of them. I was proud of it. It was one of the most important things I have ever voted on.

What have the Republicans been doing ever since? Trying to figure out a way to rescind the Affordable Care Act and all the protections I just mentioned. They want to go back to the good old days when you couldn't buy

health insurance coverage, when you couldn't afford it, when a lot of the things families deal with on a regular basis just weren't covered by health insurance.

They tried it in Trump's first term. I remember—and I bet the Senator does too—when Senator John McCain of Arizona was the deciding vote. It was 2:30 in the morning. He walked into the well of the Senate and stood there. He couldn't raise his arm because it was broken when he was a POW, but he got it up a little bit, and he voted no. His vote saved the Affordable Care Act from Trump in his first term, trying to get rid of it.

Now they are back again, and this time, they are assaulting the cost of health insurance premiums for families. That is why this gathering on the floor is so important and so timely.

All across the United States, families in Illinois and Connecticut and other States are getting notices of the new premiums as of the first of the year, and it is stunning. I will talk about a few of them that I found in my State of Illinois. This issue of affordability is on the minds of my constituents. You talk about the cost of living. You talk about inflation. You talk about the budget. Hold on to your hats. The next time you go to the mailbox, there may be a notice—if you are one of the half a million people in Illinois under the Affordable Care Act—of the increases in premiums at the first of the year.

Last week, we learned from the Department of Insurance in Illinois that Illinois residents can expect to see a nearly 80-percent average cost increase for the Affordable Care Act health plans—80 percent—which is virtually doubling it. That is in the northern part of the State. They are tripling it in the southern part of the State—tripling the current health insurance premiums. Why? Because Republicans in Congress refuse to sit down with any Democrat and negotiate an extension of a crucial policy that helps tens of millions of Americans afford their health insurance.

Since last week's announcement of the 2026 insurance premiums, I have gotten regular soundings from my constituents.

Karen lives in the suburbs of Chicago, and she wrote to me and said:

I am in absolute disbelief about the increase in my ACA insurance plan.

As I mentioned, half a million people in my State are currently covered by these plans.

She writes:

I worked hard all my life and cannot believe that I will not be able, at [age] 62 . . . to afford to go from \$565 a month to \$1,600 . . . a month for health insurance.

It is triple the amount she is currently paying.

Karen concluded with this heartbreaking note:

Please fight for those of us who will lose access to health insurance. . . . I have a young grandchild and another one on the way. . . . I want to be able to see them grow.

She is not alone. Families in Illinois will pay an additional \$2,500 on average for their health insurance next year. That is an extra \$200 a month. But for some, especially in rural areas, it may triple instead of double.

Families in Jackson County—now, that is in deep southern Illinois. That is where you find Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Families in Jackson County will see their monthly premiums increase from \$122 a month to \$458 a month. That is \$4,000 more per year for health insurance premiums. That isn't all. Families in Effingham County, which is a little bit north of Jackson County, will see their monthly premiums increase from \$185 a month to a staggering \$1,000-plus a month, which is an annual increase of \$10,000 for families living in these small towns.

It is not just the families in my State who are going to struggle. I looked to Missouri. I grew up in East St. Louis, across the river from that State. They are asking the same question: Can I afford health insurance anymore?

In Missouri, 383,000 people rely on ACA's enhanced premium tax credits to afford their health insurance.

I don't know why the Republican Senators from Missouri aren't coming to the floor to join the Democrats to protest what is going to happen to health insurance in their State. If Congress does not extend the credits that were not renewed under the big, beautiful Trump budget plan, the people in Missouri will have to pay 70 percent more for their insurance next year.

A Missouri couple in their sixties with a household income of \$85,000 has to pay an extra \$23,000 a year for health insurance—from \$7,225 a year now to \$30,000 next year. Think of it—\$30,000. It is just unimaginable—more than \$2,000 a month in premiums.

A Missouri newspaper stated:

An individual with an income of \$62,600 a year—

And that is not a wealthy person—

would have to pay the full premium if the enhanced credits are not extended. That means paying \$9,060 over a year for the average . . . plan instead of \$5,321, an increase of 70%.

How can families do this? They are struggling to get by with buying groceries. The utility bills are going through the roof. Now comes this added expense. Price increases of this magnitude will cause millions to lose their health insurance.

I asked the director of insurance in Illinois: Of the 500,000 who have affordable care plans in our State—a fourth of the farmers in our State, for example, have it and half of the shopkeepers in our State—how many do you think will drop their insurance when they read about these new premiums in the next few days that are coming across in their mailboxes?

She said: Thirty to forty percent will give up their insurance.

What does that mean?

Well, for the family, it is a tragedy—it is a terrible tragedy—for fear they

are going to have some serious illness. For medical providers, it means that sick people will still show up at the emergency room and in the hospital; they just won't be insured, and they won't be able to pay these hospitals, some of which will fail as a result.

Our State has anticipated that anywhere from 160,000 to 275,000 Illinoisans will lose health insurance because their premiums are going through the roof.

This is what the government shut-down is all about.

We are saying to the Republicans: Join us in a bipartisan effort to provide relief for these families who are going to pay these high premiums in Illinois and in Missouri and all across the United States.

As it turns out, if you are just looking at the raw politics of the situation, there are more families from States that Trump carried while he was running for President than from States that he didn't carry who are affected by this; yet silence—silence—from the Republican side of the aisle.

Hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans go to bed each night knowing that they are one illness or one accident away from heartbreak and financial ruin for their families. I can't understand the indifference on the other side.

Listen to what Bruce of Quincy, IL, wrote to me. He said:

I can no longer pay for my health insurance. . . . It went from \$361 a month to \$1,774 a month.

It went from \$361 to \$1,770.

He said:

I am a cancer survivor and a retired, disabled professional firefighter. . . . I [just] don't know what I'm going to do.

How long are we going to have to wait to provide help for Bruce and others? There are millions of people like those who have written to me and those who I am sure will learn to their surprise that they are also victims of this.

This is something that we ought to agree on, for goodness' sake. Everybody needs the protection of health insurance and the peace of mind. To think that families will be forced to drop it because of our inaction on Capitol Hill is inexcusable.

Thanks again to the Senator from Connecticut for drawing us all together.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Connecticut for convening us here.

This is a pretty normal thing that we do on a regular basis. We come down here and talk about something we care about. But it is kind of worth noting that this is a very unusual moment.

Most of the discussions I have had in the last hour are about trying to figure out whether we are paying food stamp benefits or we are not paying food stamp benefits. I don't know if the Presiding Officer or any Republicans who may wander onto the floor of the Sen-

ate could help us, but there are millions of really hungry families out there who have no idea whether they are getting nutrition benefits or not.

The law says they have to get benefits because Republicans and Democrats have put into the law a requirement that the President, during a shut-down, use a contingency fund, which is flush with money—\$5 billion—to pay those benefits.

The President has, alternatively, over the past 72 hours, said he is paying them; he is not paying them; he is going to comply with the court order; he is not going to comply with the court order.

This is madness. The President of the United States is playing with people's lives right now. He may think it is funny. He may think he is scoring political points, but this is ultimately leading to ruin for people. And it is yet another example of the enthusiasm that this President and many of his enablers here in the U.S. Senate have for ruining people's lives so as to be able to pad the pockets of the very rich, the very wealthy, and the very powerful in this country.

Why are we shut down right now? We are shut down primarily because Republicans have refused to negotiate with Democrats on whether or not we should write a budget that intentionally destroys the American healthcare system.

Republicans passed this Big Beautiful Bill at the beginning of the year, which intentionally sets our healthcare system on a death spiral. You can't pull \$2 trillion out of the American healthcare system without parts of it collapsing: massive cuts to Medicaid, massive cuts to the Affordable Care Act, cuts to funding that goes to nursing homes, 17 million people losing their healthcare, a couple million immediately because of these Affordable Care Act subsidy cuts but, over time, 17 million people. That is a cataclysm. That is a cataclysm.

The reason we are shut down is because Republicans are refusing to negotiate with Democrats over our "unreasonable demand" that we just make the pain of the Big Beautiful Bill a little bit less acute this fall when premiums are scheduled to go up on American families by thousands of dollars.

These people are worth fighting for. This principle that the government shouldn't exist to transfer money from the poor and the middle class to the wealthy and the powerful is a principle that is worth fighting for.

Yesterday, Senator WARREN, Senator SMITH, and I took a trip down to South Florida. Why did we go to South Florida? Because in South Florida is the highest concentration of people in this country who rely on the Affordable Care Act for their healthcare coverage. In fact, in many parts of South Florida, one out of every four families gets their healthcare from the Affordable Care Act. They also need these subsidies to be able to make their healthcare affordable.

The decision that we are making now—are we going to continue the subsidies or are we not—it is a matter of life and death for everybody who relies on those subsidies in America but, in particular, in South Florida.

I guess I just want to share what we are talking about here. We met a gentleman by the name of Seth Grossman. He is a small business owner. He is a husband. He is a father. He has a wife with a diagnosis of cancer, and the ACA is what pays their medical bills.

He just went onto the exchange to see what his increase will be for the year. One thousand dollars would have been hard to handle. They run on a pretty tight budget. Five thousand dollars, well, that is a head-scratcher how the Grossmans are going to figure that out. Ten thousand dollars, wow, that would be pretty bad. An \$18,000 increase for the Grossmans for their healthcare, an \$18,000 increase in their premiums because of what Republicans did, intentionally, so that they could muster up enough money to give a massive tax cut to corporations and the wealthy. My Republican colleagues decided to increase premiums on the Grossmans by \$18,000—they have got a cancer diagnosis that they are trying to pay for—just so they can help out their wealthy and powerful friends. But it gets worse.

Kara Farley told us her story. She had a hard time telling us her story. We had a hard time listening to her story.

Kara is a mother of four living in South Florida. She is already a cancer survivor, having survived ovarian cancer, but she just got a new diagnosis: a malignant melanoma. Her husband has a complicated form of diabetes, in which he often has seizures if it goes untreated. For 20 years, it went untreated. He was in and out of the hospital. Why? Because they were uninsured. They could not afford insurance. But the ACA and the subsidies saved them.

But now Kara has this new diagnosis. She has visits planned out over the next several months to address, to try to treat this malignant melanoma. Her premiums are not going up by 10 percent, not by 20 percent, not by 50 percent but by 100 percent. Her premiums are doubling.

They cannot afford that. Do you know what conversation Kara and her husband are having? Which one of us is going to survive? We can't afford healthcare for both of us, so for our kids, which one of us should get treated and which one of us shouldn't?

Why are you putting people through that just so that you can give a new \$270,000 tax cut to the very wealthy in this country?

This is a choice. This is a choice that our Republican colleagues have made, to put families in this country through a kind of inhumane misery, deciding which parent will live, just to enrich people who are already making millions of dollars.

This is a principle worth fighting for. These people are worth fighting for.

We are shut down today because Republicans refuse to even talk to Democrats about a path forward to make sure that Kara and her husband don't have to choose which of them live. It is an abomination that we are even in that conversation, and I am glad to be here on this floor with my colleagues to explain in very real terms what this is about.

This isn't about politics. This isn't about point-scoring. This isn't about elections. This is about human beings that Republicans have intentionally decided to leave in a ruinous condition.

I am proud of my Democratic colleagues for standing up and fighting for a very simple premise; that if we are going to pass a budget, it better be a moral budget. If we are going to pass a budget, it better be a budget that doesn't send the healthcare system of South Florida and the healthcare system of many other parts of this country into a death spiral.

As we left those families yesterday, they were begging us to keep up this fight, begging us not to give in, begging us not to cave. It is a fight worth having.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I thank my colleagues—both colleagues—from Connecticut.

As Senator MURPHY just said, a budget is a moral statement and how you handle the needs of your constituents in the end has got to be something that you feel in your heart.

What we are saying today is that our constituents' healthcare, it is not something you can just bargain away over the summer and cut trillions of dollars from Medicaid or Medicare or the Affordable Care Act and think it is all going to be OK. And as our colleagues are learning, it is not OK.

I start with the kitchen table. That is where people see their bills, and that is where, right now, they are seeing their grocery bills. For millions of Americans right now, they don't even know if they are going to be able to get groceries for their kids. That is because of what has been happening, not just with the healthcare premiums but also with those millions of Americans—those families, those veterans, those seniors, people with disabilities and their families who use SNAP. A lot of people might not have known how important this is to these families.

Well, when you go to grocery stores in rural America and you talk to the smalltown grocers, you find out just how many people, at various points of their life—maybe they are working several jobs, maybe they went through a divorce and they don't have enough money to be able to get their groceries, maybe it is a family who struggles and their child has disabilities and can't work.

These stories are all across our country right now, so that is why it is so

callous that the administration, when they know they can transfer funds from anywhere to pay for SNAP, has decided that they are going to take on this fight—so why not give trillions of dollars to wealthy people and then tell people they are not going to be able to get their groceries.

First they said: Well, we are not going to do it.

Then the court stepped in—Rhode Island, Massachusetts—and said: Yes, you are going to do it. The law says you have to, at the very least, use this contingency fund for \$5 billion that is sitting there. And, no, you are not going to use it for a golden bathroom in the White House and you are not going to use it in a ballroom and you are not going to use it for anything else that you think is your vanity project of the day; you are going to use it to help people afford food.

That order came out. They also said: And guess what. You can also transfer funds from other places to be able to help pay for people's SNAP and their groceries.

The administration first says: Yes, we will comply with the order. The USDA Secretary, Secretary of Agriculture, says yes. Then the next thing you know, we suddenly find out: No, we are just going to pay for half of stuff. We are going to pay for half of stuff. Now we are going to tell some States it is OK, some States it is not. We are going to mess around.

Then what happens today, in the middle of the day, then the President sends out a statement, an official statement, on his platform of choice, Truth Social, and says: We are not going to pay SNAP benefits. Sorry.

He signs it, "Donald J. Trump." It is right there, anyone can see it.

Then, today, the Press Secretary says: No. No. No. No. We are going to pay the SNAP benefits.

This will eventually be resolved in court this week, an emergency order. My very strong belief is that the court is going to say: None of this. You are following the court orders. You are going to provide the SNAP benefits.

But think about those families looking at their bills and think about the families looking at their healthcare bills, which is what we are here about today.

Basically, what we are seeing here is people are standing on a healthcare cliff 4 days into the Health Insurance Marketplace open enrollment period across America. Whether it is blue States or red States, we happen to know that 75 percent of the people on these Affordable Care Act policies live in States that Donald Trump won. Why? Well, a lot of small companies, a lot of rural areas, 27 percent of farmers and ranchers are on Affordable Care Act plans.

If you work at a big corporation in a big city, you are going to have healthcare. They are going to provide it to you. If you work at a government entity, whether it is local, whether it

is State, whether it is Federal, you are going to have healthcare. But if you are an entrepreneur and start your own small business like the woman I met with in Eagan, MN, on Friday, who has one employee that she loves, who had cancer. She pays 75 percent of the premiums for him and his wife; he pays 25 percent. And you are barely making it go right now—you know, tariffs and all this stuff going on. Then, you think: Can I even keep this employee or can I keep the employee but then they won't have health insurance? They made it through cancer. I love this employee, and I want to keep him on. Those are decisions Americans are making right as they see these premiums double across the country. It is across every single State.

In Texas, a 60-year-old Texas couple, for example, earning about \$80,000 a year can see their premium increase by more than \$17,000.

I was just on a call with some Nebraskans. They are going to see a doubling, tripling of their health insurance premiums.

We have heard, time and time again—Senator MURPHY just mentioned Florida, but whether you are talking to people in Idaho or Utah, whether you are talking to people in the rural areas of West Virginia, they are seeing the same thing: doubling, tripling of their premiums.

And it is within our grasp to do something about it. This amount of money for a year of it—and you can double that to 2 years—is literally nearly the same amount of money as the President gave to Argentina. How can that even be possible that we, as a country, think that it is better for our country to give \$20 billion to Argentina than it is to help the small business owner be able to afford her employees' health insurance? How could we even, in our wildest dreams, decide that is a priority—or that the priority is a gilded bathroom in the White House?

This is happening all over this country. It is time for our House colleagues to come back after their 6-week vacation. It is time for our Senate Republican colleagues to sit down and negotiate with us—because this is not a December thing. This is not a January thing. This is a now thing. It is happening now.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, as I come to the floor, I reflect on how I have never understood what it is in the Republican mind that is so fixated on taking healthcare away from people. It really doesn't make sense. It may be some recessive political gene that goes back to when Republicans opposed Medicare, attacked it as socialized medicine, tried to make sure it never happened. But it really doesn't make sense.

But it is active still, and Americans are looking at three waves of attack on their healthcare. The first wave is pulling their Affordable Care credits. That

is a big deal for a lot of people. Twenty-four million Americans are going to be affected and are going to see their costs for healthcare likely double.

In Rhode Island, my small State, tens of thousands of people are going to be similarly affected, with huge increases in their monthly costs for the same healthcare. And because so many of them aren't going to be able to afford that increase, we estimate that 13,000 Rhode Islanders will lose their coverage and have to go to emergency rooms and wait in line and drive up the ultimate cost of care by not getting treatment when it is needed.

But it is not just the Affordable Care credits that are imperiled here. Right behind that is a half-trillion-dollar cut to Medicare—Medicare.

Some of us remember when President Biden gave the State of the Union and he had a bit of an exchange with Republicans in the House about Medicare. He said: You know, Republicans always are trying to cut Medicare.

And they all jumped up out of their chairs yelling and screaming and said: No, no, no. We will never cut Medicare. We are not for that. You can't say we are for that.

What did they do in the "Beautiful for Billionaires Bill"? Cut Medicare. They did it in a tricky way because they don't want to own that they are Medicare cutters. You saw that behavior during Biden's State of the Union. They do not want to own cutting Medicare. They know people like and respect Medicare and rely on Medicare.

But the "Beautiful for Billionaires Bill," by virtue of adding over \$4 trillion to our national debt, triggered another law, the sequestration law, that automatically imposes cuts on Medicare starting next year—next year. And it is a half trillion dollars in Medicare cuts.

So that is backed up behind the Affordable Care credits being pulled away. And then, behind that, comes the trillion-dollar cut to Medicaid that was right on the face of the "Beautiful for Billionaires Bill."

So you add those three things up—you pull the Affordable Care credits from the families that rely on it, you whack Medicare by half a trillion dollars, you whack Medicaid by a trillion dollars—and you have delivered a devastating blow to the American people—such a devastating blow, by the way, that the healthcare providers at the receiving end of those trillions of dollars are likely to suffer to the point of having to potentially close. Nursing homes, hospitals, provider practices, family doctors—they are the ones where this money ultimately lands. And when you take that much money away from our healthcare sector, don't think it is going to be OK because it is not.

So why do we stand and fight to protect the Affordable Care credits? Well, two reasons: one, because it is the first wave of this new Republican assault on Americans' healthcare—Affordable

Care credits, then Medicare, then Medicaid. If we don't stand and fight now, with the Affordable Care credits being sent out now, the changes in the prices, then we are in no position to defend when the Medicare cuts come through—half a trillion dollars—and when the Medicaid cuts come through—a trillion dollars.

And the second is we can have some confidence that our Republican colleagues, when they get over this fixation about taking away Americans' healthcare, will realize that a lot of the Americans whose healthcare they are taking away are their own constituents. In fact, all of the evidence is that these Affordable Care credits go more to Republican Senators' constituents than they do to ours, which is why Republican House Members running for reelection are writing letters saying: Let's fix the Affordable Care credits. Let's extend Affordable Care credits for 2 years.

That is why Republicans in this body are saying: Yes, we know we need to negotiate to extend Affordable Care credits. We just don't want to do it right now.

So we can have some confidence in this fight that Republicans' constituents are going to let them know how unwelcome pulling the Affordable Care credits is, and that is before you even get to half-trillion-dollar cuts to Medicare and trillion-dollar cuts to Medicaid.

So this matters, and it matters to a lot of people. And it matters in Republican States. I just happened to pick Tennessee. Here is a little bit about what is going to happen in Tennessee. Tennessee families, thanks to Republicans not willing to negotiate with us, will see their premiums increase, on average, by 320 percent next year—320 percent. More than 600,000 Tennesseans rely on the State Affordable Care Marketplace, healthcare.gov, for their insurance. These families will pay, on average, \$464 more for their health insurance.

Here are some examples of how health insurance sticker shock is landing right now in Tennessee, as the notices go out for the next enrollment period. A 45-year-old in Tennessee making \$62,000—driving their own truck, working their small farm, operating their small business—will see their average annual premium costs rise by \$1,726. A 60-year-old couple making \$82,000 will see their average annual premium costs rise by \$19,329—a quarter of their \$82,000 income, gone like that, because Republicans won't sit down and negotiate like grownups. A family of four making \$126,000 will see their average annual premium costs rise by \$9,087.

This just isn't going to work, my friends. You are going to have to figure this out. Otherwise, around 210,000 Tennesseans will go uninsured.

And, by the way, because the money flows through to the healthcare providers, providers in Tennessee will take

the hit. They will lose an additional \$1.3 billion in funding that supports healthcare in Tennessee—\$1.3 billion—"billion" with a "b." So it is time to fix this.

Over and over again, Senate Republicans have said: Yes, we are willing to negotiate. We just don't want to do it now. We want to do it later.

So all of this pain, the damage the President is throwing on with his SNAP cuts, the damage Trump is throwing on by adding that he threatens to close American airspace—believe it or not, this is a President who will close American airspace before he will help Americans get healthcare coverage. Think about that just for a moment. Let that thought land: close American airspace rather than give Americans healthcare coverage.

And the fight, the gravamen of this dispute right now, isn't over negotiating. It is over when to negotiate. Really? It is worth causing all this damage over when to negotiate? I would say you could negotiate right now and we could come to an agreement within a week that would put an end to the continuing resolution and we could go forward.

There is one problem. I think President Trump doesn't want the shutdown to end. I think his creepy minion at the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought, doesn't want the shutdown to end. They like the shutdown. They looked forward to the shutdown. They gave "Gatsby" parties at Mar-a-Lago during the shutdown. Everything about this shutdown thrills their dark hearts, and they couldn't care less about Americans' suffering.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I rise today on behalf of the 22 million Americans who are about to see their healthcare premiums double, on average, unless my Republican colleagues do something. We have spent the last 35 days trying to get them to care about Americans' healthcare costs going up.

I can tell you firsthand, Wisconsinites are calling me every day, begging me to stay in this fight.

Last week, we saw, for the first time, just how much Wisconsinites' premiums will go up unless President Donald Trump and Republicans do their jobs and negotiate with us. In Wisconsin, the average 40-year-old will see their premiums increase nearly 40 percent. An average family of four will see premiums skyrocket by nearly \$17,000 per year. And for a 60-year-old couple, they will be paying more than \$24,000 for healthcare next year.

And these that I am sharing right now are just statewide averages. For some folks, the reality will be much, much worse. A 60-year-old couple in Barron County, a rural county in Wisconsin, making \$85,000 a year will see an increase of over 800 percent in their premiums. That is a \$33,000 increase,

more than a third of their entire income just to get healthcare for the year.

And behind all of these statistics are real people. Open enrollment started just 4 days ago, and right now Americans can log onto healthcare.gov and see just how ruinous these premium costs will be to their budgets for next year.

I have heard from constituents like Carol, a retired high school teacher in Menomonie, whose premiums are going to go up by nearly \$2,000 per month. Will she have to drop her insurance entirely?

I am hearing from small business owners like Teresa in Milwaukee County. As a metastatic breast cancer patient, going without insurance is simply not an option. Will doubling premiums in 2026 jeopardize her entire business and all of the people that she employs?

And I have talked to soybean farmers like Phil in Spring Valley, who is adding healthcare costs to the growing list of crises Donald Trump has created for his business. He is already losing \$85 an acre because of Trump's trade war. Where is he supposed to find extra money to afford his health insurance?

These are real questions that 22 million Americans are asking themselves as they start logging on to healthcare.gov to buy insurance for 2026, only to find their costs have increased astronomically. These price increases are not an issue that will stop at any State line. Who you voted for or what political party you belong to does not matter; prices are going up for Americans in every single State.

These 22 million Americans all have a story to tell, and sadly, many of my Republican colleagues are not telling those stories. So I am here to do that because, regardless of where you live in this country, I fundamentally believe you should have good healthcare that doesn't break the bank.

Take Iowa, for instance, where 120,000 Iowans saved an average of \$470 each month because of premium tax credits. That is over 100,000 people who are about to see their healthcare premiums double, triple, maybe even quadruple. People like Lori from Des Moines, a cancer survivor, who needs these tax breaks to afford lifesaving screenings, MRIs, and routine care.

If these tax credits expire, her premiums will go from \$8 per month to over \$600 per month, and she will have no other option than to opt out of health insurance entirely. She simply cannot afford it. And Lori isn't alone. Estimates show that the average premiums for Iowans with marketplace coverage will increase by over \$1,000 next year. For Iowans already struggling to make ends meet, that is simply unaffordable.

I also talked to Jenny from West Des Moines. After Jenny's husband died of cancer, she started using the Affordable Care Act to find health insurance for herself and her son. She shared last

week that "[w]ithout the enhanced tax credits, my premiums are going to more than double." She continued, "As hard as it's going to be for us, I know it's going to be a lot harder for a lot of other single mothers."

Iowa, like Wisconsin, also is home to countless rural and agricultural communities that are going to be hard hit by Donald Trump's healthcare crisis. More than 1 in 4 farmers nationwide rely on the Affordable Care Act for their coverage, and taking away these tax credits will be yet another blow.

As Aaron Lehman and Matt Russell from the Iowa Farmers Union wrote in a recent op-ed, "Iowa farmers are being stressed right now by low prices because of trade wars, increased production costs, tens of millions of dollars in cuts to USDA programs, like support for conservation and specialty crop production . . . A dramatic increase in 2026 health care premiums for thousands of rural Iowans will crash individual family budgets and intensify the economic crisis."

Listen to them. Healthcare premiums will crash families' budgets. These farmers have already been dealt a terrible hand by this administration—and now this?

And let's not forget, we are having this debate after Donald Trump and Republicans already took a hacksaw to the rural healthcare system with their "Big Ugly Bill." Their cuts to Medicaid are going to cost rural hospitals nearly \$150 billion over the next decade, forcing many to close and even more to drop some of their least profitable services—but vital services—like labor and delivery and mental healthcare.

Unless Republicans and Donald Trump come to the table, the expiring Affordable Care Act tax breaks will put salt in the wound for rural Iowans and Wisconsinites alike. So if Donald Trump and my Republican colleagues won't listen to Democrats, I hope they will listen to Iowans like Jenny and Lori who are terrified how they will be able to make ends meet without these tax breaks.

To my Republican colleagues: There was plenty of room in the budget to deliver tax breaks for the ultrawealthy and big corporations, but what about hard-working Americans?

The path out of this is so incredibly clear. Republicans can come to the table today to work with Democrats, to reopen the government, and protect their own constituents from skyrocketing costs; or Republicans can "whistle past the graveyard" as they green light the largest premium spike in history. To me and your voters, the choice is clear. I just hope you can listen and stand up for working families.

If not, millions of Americans will know whom to blame when they can no longer afford their insurance.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CURTIS). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, thank you to all of my colleagues,

most recently the Senator from Wisconsin, but also Senators DURBIN, MURPHY, KLOBUCHAR, WHITEHOUSE. And, yes, we are here to stand up for working families, as my colleague from Wisconsin has so powerfully said, and others of our colleagues who have told the stories.

We are here about real people and real pain. Sickness that they will endure, hands that won't be held, pocketbooks that will go empty, children who will go hungry, and yet not a single Republican is on the floor—not a single one.

You know, we have been here to tell stories, and we have told a lot of stories with a lot of numbers, and they all add up to people having to pay double or triple what they do now, but most of them unable to pay and still put food on the table—pay their rent or mortgages or electricity bills and survive financially, people who will see crushing medical debt that will drive many of them into bankruptcy.

These stories are about farmers, about small business people, about contractors, the self-employed people who don't have a big corporation to pay for their health insurance. It is about entrepreneurs and everyday Americans who otherwise will fall through the cracks. They are too old for Medicare. They make too much for Medicaid. They are not employed by a corporation.

John F. Kennedy said "life is unfair," but we have an obligation to make it fairer. And it really is in all of our interests to make healthcare available because that makes the economy not only fair but more effective.

I don't believe my Republican colleagues share the abhorrent values of this President. I don't believe my Republican colleagues want to shut SNAP down for 42 million families with children, to weaponize hunger, to play politics with the lives of Americans who can't afford to put food on the table, and to break promises, as this President has done, to exploit the shutdown.

My colleague from Rhode Island has said he thinks the President likes the shutdown. If the President wanted to end the shutdown, he could do it this afternoon. And it wouldn't take a week; it would take a few hours. All it would take is a commitment to extend the healthcare subsidies beyond the end of the year and give people the assurance that they can afford health insurance. They are making these decisions right now about whether to buy it or not.

And they cannot in Connecticut or anywhere around the country make those decisions responsibly if they are living with the uncertainty of whether these healthcare tax credits will continue.

When I was a prosecutor, we used to say "follow the money." Follow the money. Let's follow the money. Pretty simple, cuts in Medicaid, prospective cuts in Medicare, elimination of the healthcare tax credit subsidies, money

that has gone to tax cuts for the billionaires—that is a threat to our democracy. That is a threat to our economy.

The country lost a very well-known Republican in the last 24 hours, Dick Cheney, whom I came to know personally and admired in the last stage of his life for standing up on principle to an anti-democratic President who was running again. He stood up with his daughter Liz. He was criticized and disliked by many for many things, but he stood on principle for democracy.

I have thought often about our friend John McCain. Senator DURBIN referred to him, and I can't put out of my mind and I have been haunted by that moment when John McCain stood next to the table in that corner and lifted his still broken arm to give a thumbs down to a repeal of the Affordable Care Act. He stood on principle.

Today, we are asking our Republican colleagues to stand on principle. Stand up to the President who can be ruthless and retributive and just plain cruel. But Republicans have an obligation to something larger than this President, larger than the seats that they occupy here, as do we as well, which is to do the right thing for the American people.

So I hope they will channel their inner John McCain and recognize that this shutdown has been forced on all of us by an administration unwilling to come to the table and simply compromise. It is not a four-letter word. It is what the American people expect us to do.

It is what has always worked in the United States of America to enable us to overcome our divisions and our differences and to bring the country together.

This is our moment to do it, and I hope we will.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to use a prop.

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

RECOGNIZING LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, with me today are two of my colleagues from my office, Mr. James Shea and Mr. Parker Loy, and I have got another colleague coming. My chart—my exhibit—is being printed. It is not quite here. But when it comes, I will introduce him to you, too, Mr. President.

I want to talk about LSU. You know, into life a little rain must fall sometimes, and LSU has been in the news lately, and it is not altogether positive. So I wanted to come down and talk today about the LSU that I know, not

the LSU that is sometimes portrayed in the media.

Now, I didn't graduate from LSU. My mom did. My youngest brother did. He graduated from LSU and LSU med school. My middle brother George did—love George to death. He graduated from LSU in two terms: Carter's and Reagan's. It took him a while.

I taught for 15 years at LSU. I taught at the law school.

I was raised in a little town about 20 miles north of Baton Rouge. So I was raised on LSU, particularly LSU athletics. In fact, I played a little high school basketball, and, at the time, LSU basketball wasn't very popular. So they would give away tickets to high school basketball players to try to fill the stands. I tell you that because I had the opportunity to see Pete Maravich play his very first game as a freshman at LSU.

So I think I am qualified to speak about LSU.

And, look, I know what most of the world thinks when you think about LSU and other of our fine universities. You think about this. You think about athletics. I get it. I love college athletics. I watch them every weekend.

LSU certainly excels at athletics. We have—I looked it up. We have 21 sports programs at LSU. We actually have more women's sports programs than we have men's. We have 12 women's sports, and 9—yes, 12 women's sports and 9 male sports.

And I get that when a lot of people—since college athletics is so popular, I get that a lot of people, when they think of LSU, they think of Pete Maravich or they think of Billy Cannon or they think of Y. A. Tittle or they think of Joe Burrow or they think of Shaq or Odell Beckham or Seimone Augustus or Bob Pettit. I get that.

And athletics are an important part of education. When Coach Kim Mulkey, for example, at LSU, the coach of LSU women's basketball, when she takes a young person, a young woman, and molds that young woman into a responsible adult; when she teaches that young person how to experience victory but also defeat; when she teaches that young person how to treat those two imposters, victory and defeat, the same; when she teaches that young person responsibility; when she teaches that young person discipline and the value of hard work—that is education. So athletics is education.

But there is another part of LSU I want to talk about today, that I want to lift up, and that is LSU academics. LSU was founded in 1860. And, actually, LSU—people think of LSU in Baton Rouge. LSU in Baton Rouge is only one part of LSU. It is the main campus, and it is certainly an important part. But LSU is really another university as well. I forget the exact number, but LSU—we have campuses in Shreveport. We have campuses in Eunice. We have campuses in Alexandria. We now have a campus in New Orleans. I am probably leaving some out.

We have a medical school in Shreveport. We have a medical school in Baton Rouge.

We have about 29,000 students on our main campus, the LSU in Baton Rouge that most people have heard of. But, all told, in our LSU system, we have about 59,000 students, and I am very proud of that. The main campus is hundreds of buildings on about a thousand acres of land—over 1,200 oak trees, just beautiful. The architecture is in the Italian Renaissance style.

LSU was one of the first universities in the country to admit female students. There was a time, believe it or not, in our country when women receiving a higher education degree was something unusual. LSU admitted the first woman, its first female graduate, in 1905. That is a long time ago.

You may not know, but LSU is one of just eight universities in the United States—one of only eight—to have a law school, a medical school—we actually have two medical schools—a dental school, a veterinary school, and an MBA program.

That is the LSU I know, in addition to college athletics.

LSU is 1 of only 24 universities that is both a land-grant university and a sea-grant university and a space-grant university as well. Those are all designations of excellence in research.

That is the LSU that I know, in addition to athletics.

The LSU that I know, in addition to athletics, has a library—a main library in Baton Rouge—that is just simply extraordinary. It has over 3 million volumes. We have an incredible collection of rare books at our library. Some of them date back to the 15th century. We have more than 80,000 rare books. A lot of people don't know that about LSU.

The LSU Press—LSU publishes books. It publishes about 80 different titles every year. Through the years, LSU has published books that have won four Pulitzer prizes. John Kennedy Toole's "A Confederacy Of Dunces" is probably one of the best known, but it is only one of hundreds—really, even thousands.

You have probably heard of the Southern Review. That is at LSU. The Southern Review was cofounded in 1935 by Robert Penn Warren. Robert Penn Warren, of course, is a three-time Pulitzer prize winner. He published "All the King's Men." It is part of the New Criticism school.

That is the LSU that I know, in addition to athletics.

If you want to talk about media, the Reveille is our student newspaper at LSU. The Princeton Review named it as 1 of the 12 best college newspapers. And it really is impressive.

That is the LSU that I know.

The LSU that I know has over 2,000—2,000—research projects going at any one time. I will just give you a couple of examples. I don't really understand them, but they are damned impressive sounding. For example, the department of mechanical and industrial engineering is building these small, underwater

robots that can survey and collect data from the seabed floor.

The department of chemical engineering is developing molecular brushes that can scrape away molecules to give these molecules new properties. I don't understand how they do it, but this research is going to be used to improve everything from contact lenses to the recycling of plastics.

And at our college of engineering's division of computer science, there is a very impressive research project going on that is researching something known as micro-signal attacks.

Projects like these are the reason that LSU is 1 of only 21 universities that has been designated as a National Security Agency center of academic excellence in cyber operations.

That is the LSU that I know. That is the LSU that I know, in addition to this LSU—both important, both important. But LSU is even more than its fine athletics.

LSU—I looked up some of the people out there who went to LSU. And, of course, again, I talked about Bob Pettit—he was a great one—Y.A. Tittle, Joe Burrow. These are athletes. We are proud of them.

But the other LSU—this LSU—is Professor Rainer Weiss. Professor Weiss is now deceased, but he won the 2017 Nobel Prize in physics.

Professor Bradley Schaefer shared the 2011 Nobel Prize in physics for his role in supernova cosmology.

Professor Thomas Kutter and his team won the 2015 Nobel Prize for their work at the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory project.

The LSU I know is Lod Cook. Mr. COOK was a very successful businessman, the CEO of Atlantic Richfield, ARCO, for years.

The LSU I know is Mr. Pat Taylor, now deceased. He was an LSU graduate, built Taylor Energy. He was a champion for what we call the top scholarship program.

The LSU I know is Hubert Humphrey, who also went to our university.

The LSU I know is in the arts. Joanne Woodward is an LSU graduate. Rex Reed, film critic.

The LSU I know is Dr. Ronald Douglas, who is a distinguished professor of mathematics at Texas A&M University. We are very proud of him. He got his graduate degree at LSU.

The LSU I know is Virgil Suarez, professor of English at Florida State University—an award-winning writer who got his master of fine arts at LSU.

The LSU I know is Fonville Winans. Perhaps you haven't heard of him. Look him up. Famous photographer. I have a number of his breathtakingly beautiful photographs in my office.

The LSU I know is Bill Conti, who is an Emmy and Academy Award-winning composer.

The LSU I know is Nic Pizzolatto, who wrote the HBO series "True Detective."

The LSU I know is General Barrow, Gen. Robert H. Barrow, who was a general in the Marine Corps.

I could keep going for the rest of the afternoon, but I won't. I think I made my point. No matter what you read about LSU—and I know there has been a lot in the news about our athletic program and, frankly, also about our academics. I just want you to remember this, and I know I am biased. It truly is an extraordinary university. It is an extraordinary university of student athletes. That is this part of LSU. But it is an extraordinary university and collection of academics and academia as well.

I will close on this note. My first job in government was with a Governor. He was a reform Governor. He was elected to try to change Louisiana politics, and he did. And as a result, he only served one term. His name was Buddy Roemer. But Buddy used to say all the time—and he would say it to me—he would say: KENNEDY, here is what you have to understand about Louisiana. He said the key to Louisiana's future is not who the Governor is. He would say, KENNEDY, the key to Louisiana's future is not who the U.S. Senator is. The key to Louisiana's future is not the unemployment rate. We talk about it, and we worry about it, but that is not the key to our future. The key to Louisiana is not the price of oil, as important as that is to an oil State. The key to Louisiana, Governor Roemer would say, is education. And education in Louisiana is Louisiana State University.

To our media, I believe in the First Amendment right. You say what you want. I value opinions. Opinions are like elbows. Everyone has one. You are entitled to share it. But I want you to think about and learn more about the LSU I know, which enjoys excellence, not only in athletics but excellence in academics.

I thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate your attention.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I think there is a lot of confusion amongst the American people as to what is going on right now here in Washington, DC, and I want to just say a few words to address some of that.

In my view, this may well be the most consequential moment in American history since the Civil War. The decisions that we in Congress make right now will impact this country for generations to come. In America today, we have a megalomaniacal President, who—consumed by his quest for more and more power—is undermining our Constitution, the rule of law, and is pushing this country closer and closer toward authoritarianism.

I am talking about a man who threatens to arrest and jail his political opponents—yes, right here in the United States of America—not debate political opponents, not respectfully disagree with opponents. "If you oppose me, we are going to prosecute you."

This is a man who is deploying the U.S. military—our Armed Forces—into Democratic cities and allowing masked ICE agents to pick people up off the streets and throw them into vans, without due process, and take them to God knows where.

I am talking about a President who has sued virtually every major media outlet because he cannot tolerate criticism, who has taken funds away from PBS and NPR because he doesn't want objective reporting about what his policies are doing. This is a man who is actively encouraging his multibillionaire friends to buy up more and more of the media so that he will have a media that is friendlier to him.

This is a man who has extorted funds from law firms and is withholding Federal funding from States that voted against him.

Can you imagine that?

There has never been a President—Republican or Democrat—who did not understand that he was the President of the United States. "Oh. The people in Utah voted against a Democratic President? We are not going to fund them." Give them the funds that they are entitled to. That has never been the case.

And this guy is open. Trump is quite open that Mamdani is going to be elected mayor of New York City. "Well, you are not going to get Federal funds"—unheard of, illegal, unconstitutional.

And because we have a President who does not believe in the rule of law—we have just seen it right now. We are experiencing it literally at this moment. We have a President who is illegally—illegally—withholding \$5.5 billion in emergency SNAP funds—nutrition funds—from 42 million Americans, including 16 million children.

The Congress put money into a fund to make sure that, if the government shuts down, there will be funding for the millions of people who depend upon SNAP funds so that children in America and their parents and their grandparents will not go hungry in the richest country in the world, and Trump says: No, I am not going to do that. I am going to withhold the funds.

But then he changed his mind, and he announced he would comply with the court orders. They told him he had to release the funds. So he said: OK. I will comply with those orders and release the funds.

Then he announced this morning—this morning—that he was not going to release the funds and would allow children in this country to go hungry.

But wait a minute. A few hours later, a spokesperson for the White House said that he would comply with the

court's orders: withhold funds, release funds, withhold funds, release funds, all within a period of a few days.

Does anyone wonder why faith in our government now is so very low?

Let us be clear: This government shutdown—now in its 35th day—did not happen by accident in the U.S. Senate. It takes 60 votes to fund the Federal Government—60 votes. Republicans have 53 Members, and the Democratic caucus has 47. That means Republicans must negotiate with Democrats to move the budget forward. This is what has always happened until now—common sense. If you don't have 60 votes, you have got to sit down and negotiate with the minority. That is what Republicans have done, and that is what Democrats have done in the past.

But right now, for the first time in modern history, Republicans are simply refusing to come to the table and negotiate. What they are basically saying is, It is our way or the highway. Yes, we need 60 votes, but we are not going to you. You have to come to us. This is the way it will be.

To make matters worse, the Republican contempt for negotiations is so bad—so absurd—that House Speaker MIKE JOHNSON has given his Chamber, the House of Representatives, a 6-week paid vacation. They are not here in Washington, DC, and we are in the middle of a government shutdown.

Millions of Federal employees are not getting paid right now. They are wondering how they are going to feed their families. Federal employees are going to food banks. They are worried about paying their mortgages. Right now, millions of Americans are receiving notices from insurance companies, and their insurance premiums are rising precipitously—doubling and, in some cases, tripling. As I mentioned, people are worried about whether or not they are going to get their food stamps and other nutrition programs.

That is what is going on, but the House of Representatives is not in town. They are on a paid vacation. How absurd and how insulting is that?

The bottom line is, though, really: What is this whole conflict about?

Well, the Democrats are accusing the Republicans and the Republicans are accusing the Democrats and the media does its thing. What, really, are the issues that we are talking about? Let me tell you what, in my view, is going on.

I think almost everybody in the country understands that we have an economy today in which the very wealthiest people in this country—the oligarchs who were sitting right behind Trump at his inauguration, the multi-billionaires—have never ever had it so good. They are making huge amounts of money. But at the same time as the very richest people in America are becoming richer, Trump and my Republican colleagues want to pass a budget that throws 15 million low-income and working-class Americans off the healthcare they have by slashing Med-

icaid and the Affordable Care Act by \$1 trillion. On the one hand, they want to give massive tax breaks—trillions of dollars in tax breaks—to the 1 percent. They are going to pay for that by cutting Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act by \$1 trillion, throwing 15 million people off the healthcare they have.

It is no great secret—well before Trump and before this whole shutdown and cuts to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, it is no great secret to any American that our current healthcare system was broken; it was dysfunctional; and it was cruel. Today, despite spending twice as much per capita as the people of any other major country on Earth, 85 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured. Before these cuts, half a million Americans were going bankrupt every year due to medically related debt.

It is bad enough you have cancer or some other terrible disease, but in addition to worrying about whether you are going to stay alive, you have got to worry about how you are going to pay hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills. Many can't. In fact, 42 percent of cancer patients drain their entire life savings within 2 years of their diagnosis. If that is not a broken system, I don't know what is. One out of every four cancer patients loses their homes to foreclosure or eviction because of the outrageous cost of healthcare in this country.

In the midst of all of that—a broken, dysfunctional, and wildly expensive healthcare system—Trump wants to make the situation even worse by throwing 15 million people off of the healthcare they currently have. So what happens when you do that? What happens if you say to 15 million low-income and working-class people, "Sorry. You no longer have healthcare"? Well, it is not hard to understand that people can't go to a doctor. If they have a chronic health problem, do you know what happens to them? They die.

So let's be clear about it: When you throw 15 million people off the healthcare they have, according to a variety of studies from Yale and the University of Pennsylvania, up to 50,000 Americans will die unnecessarily each and every year. These are people who, if they were to have decent healthcare, would not have to die. That is what we are voting on. That is what we are debating right now: Will we allow 50,000 of our fellow Americans in every State in this country to die unnecessarily?

Let us be very clear: These cuts will not only kill people, not only throw 15 million off the healthcare that they have, but it will devastate nursing homes that are highly dependent on Medicaid for their funding. It will devastate community health centers and rural hospitals all over this country. That means the quality of care in nursing homes, in rural hospitals, and in community health centers will deteriorate. In other words, the budget that Trump is demanding to be passed here

in the U.S. Senate will be a horror for working families all across this country.

But that is not all. That is not all. It is not just throwing 15 million people off the healthcare they have. At a time when health insurance in this country is already outrageously expensive and people can't afford it today, Trump's proposal—his Big Beautiful Bill and what he wants Democrats to do—is to vote for a budget that doubles healthcare premiums. In my State of Vermont, it is not just doubling; in some cases, it is tripling and even quadrupling.

So right now, when people can't afford healthcare, how are you going to see a doubling of your premiums and a tripling of your premiums? That is going to impact some 20 million Americans—many of whom, by the way, are getting their notices right now from insurance companies, people who are on the Affordable Care Act.

According to every poll that I have seen, the American people, quite understandably, by overwhelming margins, do not want to see a doubling of their healthcare premiums.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 78 percent of Americans—including 59 percent of Republicans—want to extend the Affordable Care Act tax credits.

I have to say I am not a great fan of the Affordable Care Act. I believe that we should do what every other major country on Earth does and guarantee healthcare as a human right through a Medicare-for-all, single-payer program. If you want cost-effective, universal healthcare, that is the way to go. Unfortunately, I don't have a lot of support for that here in the Senate.

So our immediate job, at least, is to make sure that 20 million people who get their health insurance through the Affordable Care Act do not see a doubling of their premiums.

This impacts, believe me, not just Democrats but Republicans as well.

Tony Fabrizio, President Trump's own pollster, has said—this is Donald Trump's own pollster:

By broad bipartisan margins, voters want to see the [Affordable Care Act] tax credits extended rather than expire at the end of the year, whether in the context of premiums doubling or 5 million families losing their health insurance. This includes solid majorities of Trump voters and swing voters.

Tony Fabrizio, President Trump's own pollster.

So it is not just Democrats; it is not just Independents; it is not just the far left; it is Trump supporters.

Further, at a time of massive income and wealth inequality, the American people do not want to see the billionaire class receive a trillion dollars in new tax breaks for the 1 percent.

So let me be clear. I know this is a radical thought, but the truth is, Elon Musk, the richest man alive—worth some \$500 billion; a man who owns more wealth than the bottom 52 percent of American households—do you

know what. I don't think he needs a tax break. Now, around here, that is a radical statement. Nor does Mr. Bezos. Nor does Mr. Zuckerberg. Nor does Mr. Ellison. Nor does anyone in the top 1 percent who today is doing phenomenally well.

It is time that we started worrying about the working families of this country, people who cannot afford healthcare, who can't afford to pay rent or the mortgage—the cost of housing is outrageously high—who can't afford childcare, who can't afford to send their kids to college, who can't afford to buy decent food at the grocery store. Those are the people we should be worrying about, not tax breaks for Mr. Musk and the other billionaires in this country.

Mr. President, let me be very clear in telling you what I will not be doing. I will not vote for a budget that throws 15 million Americans off the healthcare they have. I will not be voting for a budget that doubles premiums for 20 million Americans. I will not be voting for a budget that decimates rural hospitals, nursing homes, and community health centers. I will not be voting for a budget that causes over 50,000 Americans to die unnecessarily every year. I will not be voting for a budget that provides a trillion dollars in tax breaks to the top 1 percent.

I hope very much that we can win some Republican support in opposition to these disastrous proposals, but at the very least, I would hope that the vast majority of my colleagues in the Democratic caucus will not vote for these proposals. In my view, Democrats in the Senate must stand with the working families of our country and in opposition to Trump's effort to virtually destroy the American healthcare system today.

The American healthcare system was broken before Trump, but when you throw 15 million people off of healthcare and you decimate rural healthcare and you raise premiums for 20 million people on the Affordable Care Act, you are bringing the healthcare system to the verge of collapse.

Poll after poll shows that the American people know what, in fact, is going on. They understand who is responsible for this shutdown. They want strong opposition to Trump's unprecedented and dangerous agenda—not just Democrats, not just Independents, but Republicans as well.

Despite the Democratic Party's all-time-low approval rating, Independents and even a number of Republicans are now standing with the Democrats in their fight to protect healthcare for working families.

If Democrats surrender now, at a time when Trump already has no regard for our democratic system of checks and balances, he will simply be emboldened to go forward and decimate programs not just in healthcare but programs that protect the elderly, protect the children, protect the sick,

and protect the poor, while giving more tax breaks and other benefits to the people on top.

Now is the time for us to stand with the American people. They know the economy is rigged. They understand that it is absurd and unfair to give tax breaks to billionaires and throw millions of people off of the healthcare they have. They understand that it will be a horror show if 20 million-plus Americans are forced to see a doubling in their healthcare premiums.

The American people want the Senate to stand tall and say no to Mr. Trump and the Republican leadership. I hope we will be able to do that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today, along with my colleagues—I see Senator KIM is here from New Jersey, and I know Senator BENNET is here from Colorado, and you are going to also hear from Senators WELCH, BALDWIN, COONS, and MERKLEY. And really everyone in the Senate should be pretty concerned right now about what is happening with SNAP.

We have 42 million Americans who rely on SNAP.

I see Senator SANDERS is here as well from Vermont, who I know has visited food banks throughout his State and gets what is going on right now.

What is happening to these 42 million Americans, including 16 million kids, 8 million seniors, and 4 million people with disabilities, should not and does not have to happen.

SNAP is critical for people who have multiple jobs, work part-time jobs, work regular hours. I have met with so many people, particularly in rural Minnesota, who—this is their lifeline. Their salaries aren't as high. Sometimes they get divorced. Sometimes they have like four kids. Maybe they have a kid with disabilities, so they can't work a full-time job all the time. These stories are heartbreaking.

It is colliding right now with the fact that grocery prices keep going up. You have seen what has happened here and there with eggs, with beef because of the tariffs, which are going to be the subject of a major U.S. Supreme Court case tomorrow morning. With everything going on, I want to remind people of that.

When this administration announced—announced—that it would not fund SNAP benefits this month when it previously said it would, Democrats called on the administration to use its contingency fund, which we knew that it had to do, and transfer authority, which means it can allow it to transfer funds from certain places, to ensure that Americans could put food on the table.

Given the escalating prices of food, we don't understand why the President chooses to show off about a marble bathroom with golden sconces as part

of the Lincoln Bedroom. We don't understand why the President is raising money for a gilded ballroom and demolishing the East Wing. We don't understand why, in the big, beautiful betrayal of a bill this summer, the decision was made by our colleagues to put up a bunch of tax cuts for the wealthiest while they cut SNAP benefits. And then this?

I guess we are not surprised by this, but we knew from the very beginning when this announcement was made, as the President keeps looking for things to distract us from what is the real issue here, which is healthcare premiums—first, he says he is going to—you know, he makes fun of people and makes light of what is going on and takes our leaders and puts sombreros on their heads in a video. Then the next thing he does is he pardons George Santos. Then the next thing he does is he needs money back from the Justice Department, taxpayer money. Then the next thing he does is he announces he is going to run for a third term—Steve Bannon does it—and then he says “Yeah, I am” and then he says “No, I am not.”

At some point, can people figure out what is going on here? Look at what he has done on SNAP benefits. At first, they said “Yes, we understand we must fund them,” which I appreciated—Brooke Rollins said.

During the shutdown, they had a notice on their website, this shutdown plan that was put out literally this year. It wasn't some hangover from the Biden administration; it was something from there. Then, suddenly, it mysteriously vanished. But luckily, we had taken a screen shot of it, so we knew what it said, and that was that it was Congress's intent to fund SNAP during any kind of a lapse in funding because of a shutdown.

So they say they are going to fund it; don't worry. Then they say they are not. Then we bring it to the court, and all of the States get together—25 States—and bring it to court. Big surprise: Last Friday, orders come out of two States—one of them binding on the Nation—that say: Yes, you have to fund SNAP.

So then they say: Yes, we will follow the court order.

Then what happens today? Oh, well, they are only going to fund half of a hamburger. They are just going to fund half of the benefits. Then, 3 hours later, the President puts it out on Truth Social that he is not going to fund any of the benefits. Then we are going to court again.

This is absolutely callous, it is cold, and people are scared that they are not going to be able to feed their families. It is causing complete disarray out there as some food banks are able to get their money, and some States are able to process them, and other ones have different computer equipment, so they are not able to. Really? That is

how you are going to run a government? It is no surprise that the President's numbers on running the government and his disapproval rating have gone from 50-some, 60-some and up because of what is going on here.

These courts told the administration that they must use the contingency fund to cover SNAP benefits. We know that the USDA has said there is currently \$4.65 billion in funding. So unless you are going to use those billions of dollars to make up new bathrooms in the White House, maybe you can use it to help get people's groceries on the table.

They shouldn't be forced by the courts when they know what the law says, but they have been now, and they need to follow the order. Then, in addition to that, they can use their transfer authority to make sure they transfer the money over, the remaining amount of money.

Why is this happening? We are in a shutdown because our colleagues are unwilling to come to the table to talk about one simple thing: healthcare premiums.

Do you know that 1 year of Affordable Care Act tax premiums nationally is about the same amount of money that was spent in Argentina—\$20 billion? Two years of it—about 2 years of that. Yes, that is what they have done. They prioritized \$20 billion to Argentina over the healthcare premiums in States, of which 75 percent are red States won by Donald Trump.

That is why I appreciate Senator LUJÁN's leadership on this legislation that would basically make sure we are continuing to fund SNAP.

I appreciate what Senator HAWLEY did. I am on his bill. All of our Members, that I know of, would support Senator HAWLEY's bill that would fund this during this shutdown, so why don't we call that bill up for a vote?

This has been going on for too long. The roadmap was clear this summer when they cut billions and billions of dollars from SNAP and shifted over \$80 billion to the States and then rewarded the States with the highest error rate in order to pass that bill. That happened this summer.

Now here we are today, and I guess I am not surprised. But I know that my colleagues care about these people in their States, so we are asking them to pressure the President to stop this mess, come to the table, negotiate it, call back the House from their 6-week vacation so they get back there to the negotiating table, we get through this shutdown, and we come back into the regular order of the government. But during that time, don't put this on the backs of people that can't afford food and don't decide and show off about a marbled bathroom while someone is standing in a grocery line not getting their SNAP card through. It is an outrage.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I would like to thank my colleague from Minnesota, the ranking member of the Agriculture Committee, for being here tonight and for helping to organize all of this tonight, to have this important discussion.

I think, this evening, as we are standing here, this will mark the longest shutdown in American history, and that is not something that anybody in this Chamber should be proud about. I have had the opportunity, since I have been here, to watch—year after year after year after year—as these shutdowns have gotten longer and longer.

This Chamber does not belong to the Senators that are here. It belongs to the American people. But sometimes the fight is a really important one, and we are in the fight tonight for healthcare for the American people.

One of the first shutdowns I ever was here to see and be around for was one where they were trying to defund the Affordable Care Act; they were trying to take healthcare away from the American people.

This is exactly the opposite of that. The situation we are in tonight is one where, as we meet tonight, people are having to fill out their paperwork for their new insurance premiums, and those premiums are offset by part of the Affordable Care Act that creates tax credits for working people to be able to buy insurance, to make it a little bit more affordable.

Insurance gets more expensive every single year. And we should do something about that, but we are not even having a debate about that today. All we are doing is having a debate about whether or not President Trump and his colleagues across the aisle here in the Senate want to take away those subsidies from the American people.

In my State of Colorado, the result of that is going to be that people's health insurance prices are going to double, at least. In some places, they might triple. In some places, they might go up 400 percent is what the Governor's office is saying to us.

I do feel like somehow, at the end of the day here, President Trump is going to try to find a way to make sure that those prices don't go up the way they otherwise would on the American people and try to find a way to claim credit for it. I don't care about any credit. I just think the American people need to know that their insurance is not going to skyrocket. But you never know from one day to the next. One day he is worried about the prices on Americans; the next day he couldn't care less. And that is the thing we are here to talk about tonight.

Everywhere I go in Colorado, families tell me the same thing: that prices are too high; no matter how much money they try to save during the week, they can't keep up with the cost of groceries; they can't feed their families. Many of these Coloradans—600,000—rely on a program called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program,

or SNAP, which is our country's largest and most effective program to feed hungry people and families. Every day, families rely on this program to stretch their food budgets a little further. It allows them to buy things like fruits and vegetables at the farmers market and the grocery store, pick up milk at the corner store, and for their kids to have a snack when they come home from school.

Now the Trump administration is refusing to use the money Congress has appropriated, that Congress passed from here, to fund this vital help for families. And this comes after President Trump and Senate Republicans made the largest cuts in SNAP in the history of the program, all so they could offset their tax cuts for the wealthiest people in America.

I have heard from people all over Colorado how mystified they are by that bill but also the fact that they have no idea how they are going to make ends meet by the end of the week: older adults in Pueblo County, where nearly 45,000 residents depend on SNAP who are now facing health deterioration and malnutrition without the food they need; grandmothers, like one in Arvada who can't feed her three young grandchildren; doctors who know that their patients are not going to be able to remain healthy if they can't feed their families.

All over Colorado—all over Colorado—county governments like Chaffee, Pitkin, Routt, and Summit are responding to the emergency that President Trump has created by giving grocery store gift cards to families who have lost their SNAP benefits. But that is never going to be enough to offset the damage.

Before I came to the Senate, I served as the superintendent of the Denver Public Schools. And I am sorry to say this, but in that job I have seen firsthand what hunger does to a child, what it means for learning, how it undermines not just their future but the Nation's future. We can't build a strong economy or a strong democracy on empty stomachs. Instead of helping families, instead of complying with what the courts have told them they have a constitutional obligation to do, this administration is making choices that raise costs and harm families.

These cuts to food and nutrition are the latest moves that this administration has undertaken to make people's lives harder in this country, not easier. They have made it harder for people this week, not easier, to afford groceries in America. President Trump's tariffs, as everybody in this Chamber knows, are driving up grocery prices and costs and the costs to keep our farms running. And as I said at the very outset, they are refusing to extend healthcare tax credits, the result of which could double or triple the cost of healthcare for millions of families all across America.

What a record of disgrace.

Last week, two different courts said what President Trump is doing with

SNAP is illegal. They told him to make the payments to families. But today he said he would ignore the court orders and refuse to fund the program. Later, the White House Press Secretary had to walk that back, saying that now they intend to “fully comply” with that court order. I hope that is true. I hope that is true.

President Trump has not just the power but the legal obligation to fund these benefits and to fund SNAP this month. I urge my colleagues in this Chamber to stand up for the families who depend on this critical program and demand that President Trump do the right thing and reduce the costs for working people all over this country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. KIM. Mr. President, I rise today because more than 40 million Americans, including more than 800,000 New Jerseyans, are getting ready to sit down for dinner tonight, wondering if there will be enough food for tomorrow. Roughly, one in eight Americans relies on food assistance, and they are left asking if they will be able to give their kids breakfast in the morning.

Those are questions people in my State, in every State in this country, are facing, and it leads me to this question that we should ask ourselves: How did we get here? How did we get to this place where things are so broken that American families are having to ration meals to survive? We are the richest, most powerful country in the entire world. Yet people—so many millions of families—have to ask this question of whether or not they will have enough to eat.

Now, let's start with President Trump. He is not just absent from any effort to end this shutdown; he is actively weaponizing people's hunger. Last week, two Federal judges, in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, ruled that the administration must use contingency funds or transfer authorities to continue SNAP benefits. Both courts found that it is unlawful for President Trump to hold up the money and benefits and found that emergency funds must be used to keep Americans fed during this shutdown.

Now, yesterday, his administration told a Federal judge that they would use the contingency fund to pay half of SNAP benefits, but today Trump made it clear he would defy the court order and won't pay anything unless Democrats stop our attempt to lower healthcare costs. And then the White House came out hours later to try to do some cleaning up, saying that they would comply.

I don't know what to believe. No one in America knows what to believe. How can Americans that are hungry plan their next meal with this level of uncertainty coming from the White House? That is not leadership.

Now, we know this President has the authority to make this pain stop. During his first term, his own administra-

tion issued guidance saying these contingency funds are available if SNAP funds lapse due to a government shutdown. Now, during the second term, the preshutdown documents confirming the USDA would be able to continue funding SNAP have just vanished. They are just gone, removed from the website.

So we know the authorities exist. We know the money exists. What we don't know is the willingness of Donald Trump to put American families ahead of himself. We have billions to send to Argentina, hundreds of millions for a new gold-plated ballroom. But money to keep food on the table for millions of families, Donald Trump doesn't think that is a priority.

Well, of course, he is wrong, and that is one way that we arrive at this moment.

The second reason why families are having to question where their next meal is coming from is found across the Capitol, where Speaker Johnson, just on the other side of this hallway, hasn't brought the House into session in more than 45 days.

What would happen to the American people—what would happen to your jobs if you didn't show up for 45 days?

Now, this is not just an abdication of responsibility; it is a dereliction of duty, and people will suffer because of it. There is real harm. It is not rhetorical.

So for these 42 million Americans, they are not asking for the Moon. They are just asking for a little help to be able to feed their kids, to be able to feed their families in a time of need, to be able to just be able to provide a life of dignity and decency.

Now, this is something that our government should do. What is the value of government if we cannot help people, our fellow citizens, in their time of need? It is at the core of what we do. And at a time like this, I find myself thinking back to Mr. Rogers' quote “always look for the helpers.”

We all know that line. As I look around, I ask: Well, where are the helpers? I look at the White House. I see corruption; I see cruelty. I look at the House of Representatives that has been on nearly a 7-week vacation—getting paid—while many government employees are showing up to work and not getting paid, worrying about whether or not they are going to be able to pay the bills.

While President Trump and House Republicans fail them, I see in my own home State of New Jersey people stepping up to be the helpers. I see people back home who have taken it upon themselves to do what the White House and the congressional Republicans have prevented us from doing—people like Mary from Medford, who, as a teacher, is personally doing check-ins with her students to make sure their families have resources as New Jersey heads into winter while also organizing a Thanksgiving drive with her friends and family to collect winter items and

food to donate to Camden; or Pamela from Rocky Hill, who has taken it upon herself to purchase grocery store gift cards and send them to AmeriCorps members across New Jersey who would otherwise rely on SNAP for monthly food costs; or Leslie from Stockton, who is donating to local food banks in her community, who says that “I feel very fortunate that I can [donate food]. No one in this country should lack a roof over their head, heat in their home, medical care or nutritious food.”

I wish those words were coming out of the President of the United States. I wish those values were shared by the leaders in the House of Representatives that are not even showing up.

These are just snapshots of hundreds of stories we have received from New Jerseyans who have stepped up in their own communities by increasing donations to food banks, given away their free turkeys from the grocery stores, volunteering more at local pantries across the State. The list goes on and on.

Well, I want to close here by highlighting the last part of Mr. Rogers' famous quote. We all know, “Look for the helpers.” What is not as commonly thought of is the sentence that follows.

It says:

Look for the helpers . . . because if you look for the helpers, you'll know that there's hope.

As my office continues to receive stories from all over my State, I am just so proud to represent these 9 million Americans who left, right, or center, old and young, are currently stepping up. They are the helpers who give me hope.

I urge my colleagues to listen to those back home in their States, those here on the floor telling stories from back home. We cannot allow Americans to go hungry. We cannot allow these games to go on with people's lives.

We must become the helpers for those we represent. That is the true meaning of the job that we do here. While we carry the title of Senators, ultimately, what the people ask of us is to be the helpers that they can look to, to be able to help them in their time of need. And right now, that means fully funding SNAP so people in this country don't go hungry.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I rise today to give voice to the more than 700,000 Wisconsinites who use SNAP to put food on the table. We call it FoodShare in our State, and it is nothing short of a lifeline for over 40 million Americans. But, unfortunately, right now, Donald Trump is pulling the rug out from under American families.

Let me be crystal clear: No one wins in a shutdown. And that is why I have been practically begging Republican leadership to sit down with Democrats to reopen the government, make sure

families are fed, and to lower healthcare costs.

And while I stand ready and willing to work with my colleagues on a compromise, House Republicans have been on vacation for 45 days. Donald Trump has been jet-setting around the world, and when he is back in the country, he has been focused on overseeing the construction of his big, beautiful ballroom.

But, now, he has finally started to turn his attention to the shutdown. Unfortunately for the American people, he is not coming to the table to negotiate to reopen the government and bring down healthcare costs. Instead, he is holding hungry Americans hostage and using families as political pawns. Instead of sitting down with Democrats to find a compromise to get out of this shutdown and lower costs for working families, Donald Trump illegally cut off food for nearly 42 million Americans.

President Trump made a choice not to feed hungry families. That is right—a choice. And we learned that choice was illegal. Two different judges concluded that Donald Trump was required to use contingency funds to make sure SNAP continues to flow to hungry families.

But the President was then given another choice. The judges told him that he could shift resources around to make families whole and ensure that our kids are fed. But, again, the President said no and chose to withhold Federal funding needed to keep food on the table for Wisconsinites.

Now, to put a finer point on this, the President has the money for all sorts of things—private planes for his staff, \$20 billion to bail out Argentina, and, of course, his glamorous ballroom—but he is choosing not to fund SNAP and keep 700,000 Wisconsinites fed.

This is really uncharted territory. Until now, ensuring that funding for SNAP continues has been standard operating procedure in every previous shutdown. Until Donald Trump, every President has put people above politics to keep food on the table.

By sitting on his hands and refusing to lift a finger for hungry families until a court forced him to step up, Trump has caused total and utter chaos. The resulting delays and confusions have been nothing short of devastating.

States are trying to figure out how to administer partial payments. Food pantries are seeing lines outside their doors. Families are showing up at grocery stores unsure if they are going to be able to afford to buy food. Children are going to school with empty stomachs.

Then, just today, President Trump posted on social media and further muddied the waters, leading us to question if he plans to abide by the court order to release SNAP benefits at all.

The President needs to follow court orders and provide food assistance now, and he should fund it in full.

For 700,000 Wisconsinites, Donald Trump refusing to fund SNAP adds in-

sult to injury when it comes to nutrition assistance. Remember, the President's marquee accomplishment this year was passing a massive tax bill that disproportionately benefits the wealthiest Americans and big corporations.

And how are we paying for that tax break for billionaires? Donald Trump's novel solution was, in part, the largest cut to SNAP in history.

Now, even more families are being left in the lurch because of President Trump, unsure if there will be food on the table this week.

We need to reopen the Federal Government and address rising costs for American families. We know the fastest way is Donald Trump coming to the table. I am here waiting. But in the meantime, 42 million American families should not go hungry because Donald Trump wants to use them as leverage.

President Trump, you have the power. You have the legal authority to keep these benefits flowing and feed hungry kids. Use it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues here on the floor tonight to talk about the importance of SNAP benefits. And I think you can see that what we don't need is more chaos. And we certainly don't need less help. What we need is for our colleagues on the other side of the aisle and the White House to help us with SNAP.

Now, my newspapers have been very clear.

The Spokesman-Review: "SNAP benefits remain in limbo."

The Seattle Times: "State SNAP recipients brace for lower benefits after partial funding."

The President of the United States, as my colleagues have said, has been ordered by the courts to pay for SNAP benefits, but instead of doing that, wants to continue to make life harder on not just Washingtonians, but many people across the country. Nearly 1 million Washingtonians receive SNAP benefits. We are talking about benefits that are helping them make ends meet. And as we have seen from food banks since the COVID days till now, not everybody can find food without paying exorbitant costs. So the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program was created to try to help those Washingtonians and other people feed their families and feed their children.

More than 38 percent of SNAP participants are families with members who are older adults or disabled. Nearly 10 percent of Washington households are food insecure—meaning they don't have the necessary access to have adequate food because they simply can't afford it.

So we are here tonight to talk about how we want to save SNAP. SNAP benefits, as we know, help with the average household receiving benefits—or

about \$5.92 a day. Yes, that means that the fourth most expensive State to buy groceries in the U.S. and that the average cost of weekly groceries in the State of Washington is \$287—over \$1,000 per month.

So we know that the SNAP benefit program helps us. So we know this administration likes to go from crisis to crisis, but grocery prices have been rising because of the Trump tariffs. And now, because the fact that our Republican colleagues will not work with us to open the government, those families who rely on SNAP are having a big challenge.

We know that what we need to do is put SNAP dollars back into our economy. Every dollar spent on SNAP generates \$1.54 of economic activity. In the 4 years leading up to the COVID pandemic, SNAP lifted 154,000 Washingtonians out of poverty, including 77,000 children.

My office released data yesterday showing where halting SNAP would cause the most damage. People in Yakima County, where more than 57,000 people, 21 percent of the county's residents, receive SNAP benefits. In King County—that is where Seattle is—nearly 200,000 people will lose benefits.

So let's be clear: The administration could fully fund SNAP benefits, do as the courts have asked. But for some reason, it is better to deny these people the benefits they deserve. I don't understand.

We know what the courts have said, one in Massachusetts, one in Rhode Island. It said the administration should use the available emergency funding to fulfill SNAP benefits to 42 million Americans. That is what the courts have said. So the economic hardship that is being put on these American families at the hands of this administration is unconscionable.

Why would the President freeze a program that not only stimulates the economy, helps fight hunger, feeds families, counteracts the tariff costs, and do what the courts is telling them to do? I don't understand why the American people, particularly families at lower income, are some sort of bargaining chip here in the U.S. Senate. I thought we were here to solve problems. I thought we were here to help the American people.

Yakima County, as I mentioned, one of the most hard-hit SNAP counties, is really demonstrating a failure to extend the premium tax credits that help keep insurance affordable. Data from the exchange also showed that the people in this particular county expect a 133-percent increase in health insurance premiums for those county residents.

So here we are, the most hard-hit SNAP county in our State and also now statewide facing a whopping \$1,049 per month increase in their premiums. How do my colleagues expect people in Washington to survive with out-of-control health insurance costs, out-of-control food costs, and especially as inflation rose to 3 percent in September?

So instead of coming to the table on meaningful negotiations, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are still refusing to address the high costs of food and the high costs of healthcare. We are here tonight to say it is easy to save SNAP. The President could just do it.

But let's work together to lower these extraordinary costs of healthcare on American families, to help a food program that has helped our farm communities, and certainly helped families. Let's do the right thing and help save the SNAP program.

I thank my colleagues, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I am grateful to my colleagues who have spoken this evening about the critical answer we should be giving to the question: Who is my neighbor?

I know of no faith that teaches that we should take food away from hungry children, from the seniors and the disabled and the veterans in our communities, so that we can hurt our political opponent. But, sadly, that is what our President is doing.

My foundational faith rests in the Gospels. One of the best known parables told by Jesus is the "Parable of the Good Samaritan." And lots of folks know the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" but maybe don't know exactly what it teaches. So let me just take a moment.

Jesus is asked: What are the most important parts of the law?

And he says: Recite what the law teaches.

He is asked: What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?

And he says: What does the law teach?

"Love the lord, your God, with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind" is the answer, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus says: You read correctly.

Then, being a lawyer—I always love that part—seeking to justify himself, the questioner asks the next question: But who is my neighbor?

And Jesus tells one of the most radical, challenging, and disruptive of his parables. You have to think about it in the context in which it was given. Some of the most respected people in the society he was from are exemplars, characters in this parable.

A man is going down the road and is set upon by robbers and is beaten and injured and lying on the side of the road. And a priest—one of the most respected religious leaders in ancient Israel—a priest is walking down the road and turns and passes on the other side.

And then a Levite—part of a tribe of Israel that was known for their holiness and for their descent from the priestly class—he also walks by on the other side.

And it is a Samaritan—a member of a community, a tribe, a faith that was

considered abhorrent to the ancient Israelites—who stops, who puts the wounded man on his donkey, who cares for him, who takes him to an inn, who treats his wounds and leaves money, and says to the inn keeper: I will come back and pay you whatever is required for his care.

And then Jesus says: Who was acting like a neighbor?

To which the lawyer properly says: The one who had mercy on him, on the victim.

Righteousness requires us to view and treat as neighbor those who are on the margins of life. It was Senator Hubert Humphrey, I believe, who said: The true test of a nation is how it treats those at the dawn of life—its children, those in the shadows of life, the disabled and infirm, and those in the twilight of life, the seniors.

And yet President Trump, today, in defiance of two Federal court orders, has been saying that he will refuse to distribute SNAP benefits promptly and fully.

I believe, last night, in a Truth Social post he said, "SNAP benefits"—and I am skipping the attacks on his predecessor, "will be given only when the Radical Left Democrats open up government" and not before.

The larger point is that SNAP, which is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which feeds millions of hungry Americans, is being used as a weapon, as a tool in this moment to try and leverage the hunger of millions, to put pressure on us, as a Senate, to reopen.

It is shocking that President Trump would say out loud his intention to defy court orders and to use whether or not to feed hungry children as leverage.

In my home State of Delaware, where I have heard from the head of our food bank, from the heads of lots of local organizations that care for and support seniors and children and veterans, 11 percent of our State is on SNAP—48,000 children and 4,700 veterans. Nationwide, 20 percent of all of our children are on SNAP.

It is critical to the health and safety and development of children so that they can hear the teaching in the classroom over the grumbling of their bellies.

The Food Bank of Delaware shared with me the story of a young mother whose doctor had said she had to stop working because her pregnancy was so far along and, as a result, had to leave her work at a chicken processing plant and, today, desperately needs SNAP, these benefits, to feed her four children.

What answer does President Trump and my colleagues give to the question: Who is my neighbor? On whom will they show mercy?

The answer apparently is not America's children, not veterans, not working parents, not seniors and people with disabilities.

In my home State, I am grateful for a Governor and leaders in our general

assembly who have stepped in to fill the breach and to provide these SNAP benefits temporarily. But they cannot do so for long.

I believe, in the richest country on Earth, it is a shame—it is a horror—for our children, our seniors, our disabled citizens, our veterans who rely on this program to go hungry just so we can continue fighting in this Chamber. It is long past time for my colleagues and our President to answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" in a way that includes all Americans and does not cut them off from this vital and needed support.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, President Donald Trump has a new MAHA strategy, but it is no longer "Make America Healthy Again." It is now the "Make America Hungry Agenda." The President is weaponizing food against America's most vulnerable families.

In my State of Oregon, SNAP feeds over 750,000 people, including well over 200,000 children.

Now, Oregon is roughly, from its northern border to its southern border, roughly 300 miles. So invite yourself to do a little calculation. Imagine those 700,000 people lined up along I-5, stretching 300 miles from the northern border with Washington to the southern border with California. And do you think you will see a person every mile or so? No. You would see a person every 2 feet over that 300-mile trip. It is about a 6-hour drive from the northern border to the southern border—6 hours driving past a continuous line of people.

That, my colleagues, is the vision that Trump has for more than 700,000 hungry people, almost a third—every third person in line, approximately—a child.

What kind of vision is that for America?

When children go hungry, it affects their physical development. It certainly affects the wiring in their brain, their mental development, and it certainly is devastating to their education. My colleague just noted that children can't learn when they hear the grumbling in their stomachs. He is absolutely right. Children cannot learn when they are hungry. So it is a three-fold attack on America's children.

Congress together, Democrats and Republicans, said this should never happen. So we created a contingency fund. That contingency fund has a little north of \$4.5 billion in it. And we created the ability to use an interchange to transfer funds from a tariff fund that has about \$16 billion in it—funds raised during the Biden administration from tariffs, available now to be transferred to ensure children don't go hungry. We together, Democrats and Republicans, created this twofold strategy. We together, the Senate and the House, created this strategy to ensure children won't go hungry.

But what is happening now? Well, the Department of Agriculture administers this program, the SNAP program. Back in September, the Department of Agriculture posted a notice saying: Don't worry. We will make sure we use the contingency funds to feed the children.

And then, in October, they took that down because the President said: We don't want you to use the funds that Congress set up in order to feed children. We want those children and their hunger to be a bargaining chip. We want to make children hungry. We want to diminish their physical and mental health. We want to undermine their education as a bargaining chip.

Oh, my goodness, what has this country come to that my Republican colleagues and the President of the United States are saying: Use hungry children as a bargaining chip in our Nation.

Now, the administration well understood the contingency fund, and they well understood the transfer authority. In fact, they used the transfer authority twice to fund WIC, just recently.

I saw a speech by the Speaker of the House, MIKE JOHNSON, last week, and he said: We are not going to fund SNAP because it would reduce pressure on Democrats.

There you go. You hear it again: Use hungry children as a bargaining chip here in the United States of America.

Trump posted on Truth Social: "SNAP BENEFITS . . . will be given only" once the government reopens "and not before!"

That statement on Truth Social came after last Friday's two court decisions, both of which said: Mr. President, you have a legal obligation to fund SNAP. We have a contingency fund. You have the money. You have the responsibility. And SNAP must be funded immediately.

Well, clearly that is not happening because here we are on Tuesday, and SNAP has not been funded. Here we are on November 3, and SNAP has not been funded.

The Speaker of the House and the President of the United States are using hungry children, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and vulnerable families as bargaining chips.

We are here tonight to say: Hell no. That is not the America we live in, where we help each other out. This is not the America we live in, where we fail to use the program Democrats and Republicans set up together in a bipartisan fashion to make sure children and vulnerable families don't go hungry.

Following that decision, last Friday, by two district courts saying, "Mr. President, you have a responsibility to fund these programs; you have the funds to fund these programs; so do it," the administration has come back and said: Well, we might consider using the contingency fund, but we are not going to use the interchange program. And that means, at best, that we can only fund half the benefits because, well, SNAP takes about \$8 to \$9 billion per

month, and we are talking only about \$4.5 billion, plus a few in change, that is in the contingency fund. So you have to use the interchange for the other half of the benefits.

Well, here is a big problem, because families getting this minimal support of \$6 a day per person would get \$3 a day. I am pretty confident no Member of Congress has ever gone a month funding their food on \$3 a day.

If any of my colleagues would like to volunteer to demonstrate that they can do that, it would be an interesting story for a reporter to follow you through the month—no cheating for the food you already have stored in the garage or stored in your cupboards. I am sure your cupboards are already full. Three dollars a day—give it a shot. Tell us about that.

Children are not going to get the food that they need.

You know, I am a bit older. When you get older, you don't eat as much today. But I remember how much I ate when I was a teenager. I ate probably 2½ times, 3 times what I eat now.

This second problem is really a whopper. The second problem is that the administration has said: Because we only want to fund partial benefits, all the computers have to be reprogrammed. We have got to change all the Federal systems for distributing this fund. And do you know what? All the States have to change what they do. So in a court filing, yesterday, the administration said it will take weeks or months for most States or for many States to be able to deliver the benefits.

We don't know if that was 50 out of 50 States. We don't know if that was 40 out of 50 States. But if most States have to reprogram their computers to do this calculation to get this right, the administration is saying: We are going to do the contingency fund, but people may not get it for weeks or months—with an "s" on the "months."

Months? The courts said get it done by yesterday, Monday. This is Tuesday. The administration said it is going to take us weeks or months to get the funding done. This is just a way of sneering at the court and saying "You may have ordered us, but we will find a way to slow things down"—again, using the most vulnerable Americans as a bargaining chip. That is fabulously disturbing.

Here is the court decision right here. Take a look at it. I invite my colleagues to read it on both sides of the aisle. It says right in it that families will not be able to get the funding in many States for weeks or months.

This document was penned by Patrick Penn, Deputy Under Secretary of Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is a formal filing of the Trump administration by the Deputy Under Secretary responsible.

I quote it just to make this point again:

USDA's understanding is that the system changes States must implement to provide

the reduced benefit amount will take anywhere from a few weeks to several months.

Let's take several months. So benefits get to somebody in Oregon—my 700,000-plus Oregonians who use SNAP—for November, but they don't get it until January. Really?

Colleagues, that is acceptable to you? Come to the floor and tell me why that is acceptable in your State. That is not acceptable to me. I don't think it is acceptable to any of you. So where are you? Why aren't you down here right now saying the same thing?

This should be bipartisan. It isn't just children in blue States that are affected. It is not just children in red States affected. It is everybody. Every State has a population that will go hungry if the SNAP benefits don't get to them.

So let's fix this. Together, we built the infrastructure so this would never happen. Together, let's tell the administration that they have to use this infrastructure.

You know, last night, I came down here with a resolution, and the resolution was very simple. It says that we together built the infrastructure through the contingency fund and through the interchange transfer ability to make sure children never go hungry. Together, let's tell the President: Use these powers. Fund the full benefits.

A Republican colleague came down and objected. I asked him to address the substance of the resolution, what was wrong with it. Instead, he chose to do a tirade about Democrats shutting down the government. My goodness. Really? It is like, let's talk about how to deliver a healthy meal to children, and we get a politicization of this issue. It is like moldy bread.

My Republican colleagues know they voted time and time again to reopen the government in a fashion that will not solve the healthcare problem that was created in the "Big Ugly Betrayal Bill," and Democrats voted against a Republican version of reopening the government. So the whole world knows both sides voted against a version of reopening the government.

But then you have dialogue. People talk to each other. But President Trump said: I don't want the House or Senate leadership to talk to Democrats. So the Senate Republican leadership has been unwilling to sit down and negotiate. That is not the way it is supposed to work. We are not supposed to be ordered around by a President.

The entire democracy is based on this Chamber laying out the vision for the country and working together to make sure the issues in every corner of our Nation are addressed. That is why there are 100 Senators here representing every part of the country. That is why there are 430-plus Members of the House representing every corner of the country—not a dictator, not an authoritarian saying "my way or the highway."

You lose your democracy and end up with an authoritarian government

when legislative leaders say: We are sorry; we will set our own opinions behind. We will set aside our own desire to help our people to do what the President says.

That is an authoritarian government.

Every time you hear the President say “I am shutting down a program because it doesn’t align with the priorities of my administration,” every single Senator should come down here and say “We are a republic where article I is about the power of the people, through their elected, shaping the vision for this country, not through a single person in the Oval Office.” That is an authoritarian government.

Do you want an authoritarian government? There are a list of sites I would be happy to provide you for information on how you can go vacation in those authoritarian governments, and you can decide whether you like them or not. But I am here, we are here to defend democracy, defend the vision of actually doing right by the people.

Government by and for the powerful is not the vision of our Nation, and yet here we are tonight—the President saying starve the kids and the vulnerable families as a bargaining chip while he sends \$20 billion to Argentina; the President saying starve the children and the vulnerable while he does a trillion dollars in tax breaks for America’s richest families—a bill that was passed on a partisan line by my Republican colleagues. Here we are tonight with a President saying: Starve the children and the vulnerable families because I want to build a ballroom, a golden ballroom worthy of Louis XIV.

This new strategy from the President being backed up by my colleagues across the aisle—the “Make America Hungry Agenda,” make the vulnerable into bargaining chips—is not a vision that happens when you have government by and for the people. This is a vision that occurs when you have a government by and for the powerful. But that is not the vision our Nation was founded on. We were founded on a government that serves the people.

Let’s come together and remember our mission, remember our oath of office to that Constitution that lays out the checks and balances to ensure that we serve the people, not the oligarchs, not the most powerful, not the billionaires. Let’s address this issue immediately and tell the President: We are 100 Senators strong. Fund the SNAP program. You have the authority. You have the money. You have the responsibility.

None of us should stand for those children being bargaining chips.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, the Trump administration is making history today but not in a good way—in fact, in a reprehensible and irresponsible way. In one sentence, for the first time in history in the United States of America, SNAP benefits have been stopped.

There are disasters and catastrophes that occur in the United States just as in any other part of the world, whether it is Katrina or Superstorm Sandy or the Hurricane Melissa that we just had in Jamaica abroad. There are natural disasters that are beyond our control. Rarely does humanity choose inhumanity. That is a choice that, fortunately, mankind tries to spare.

But today, Donald Trump is stopping SNAP benefits for millions of Americans across the country. In fact, one-eighth of all Americans depend on SNAP benefits. One out of every 10 people in Connecticut receives SNAP benefits. In New Mexico, the proportion is even higher—about one out of five.

This stopping of SNAP benefits is a national disaster that is not a natural disaster; it is manmade, purposeful, and intentional. Its purpose is really just to inflict pain. It is the result of an effort by the Trump administration to inflict maximum pain to magnify political pressure. Kids are pawns in this political game for Donald Trump. Millions of Americans depend on this program, including 360,000 people in Connecticut.

Republicans are saying it is the inevitable consequence of a government shutdown. False. There is money—the emergency contingency fund and revenues from other sources, like tariffs, that are more than adequate to fund the \$8 to \$9 billion for this program in November. There is an emergency contingency fund that exists for this purpose—an emergency—at least \$5 billion, perhaps as much as \$6 billion, and more than adequate resources from other accounts.

In fact, the Department of Agriculture has used those other accounts in situations like this one in shutdowns where administrations have said: We are going to feed the hungry. We are not letting Americans starve.

I have been to the food pantries and the shelters and the soup kitchens around Connecticut. What I have heard and have seen are lines of people who are going to be going hungry when the private contributions of food are exhausted, and soon they will be. That is what I am hearing from the folks who run Connecticut Foodshare, the St. Vincent de Paul pantry in Middletown.

All across Connecticut, in towns as well as cities, we face a food insecurity crisis. The term “food insecurity” is a brilliant euphemism for hunger, and the gnawing effect of hunger—we all know it prevents kids from learning or playing sports. It is debilitating—not just in the short run, it affects people in the long run nutritionally.

So this idea of “Make America Healthy Again” is really the height of hypocrisy for an administration that is making Americans hungry again.

Donald Trump just days ago said—and I am quoting almost exactly—said he would be honored to obey a court order that provided direction. Well, there is direction. Two courts have ordered it, and now he is defying those

courts. He has reversed himself in just a matter of days. Now he is saying that he refuses to provide the funding for SNAP benefits.

These court orders are not suggestions or invitations; they are mandatory directives—two courts, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and lawsuits brought by States’ attorneys general in Massachusetts and by cities, towns, and private organizations in Rhode Island.

We have been clear again and again and again as Democrats: Americans should never have to choose between food and health, between food and rent, between food and mortgage payments, between food and electricity. There should be no need for families to choose because there should be no choice by our public officials to make them choose, but that is what we are seeing right now.

We can be sure of one thing here: Kids will go to bed hungry. I have talked to their moms and dads. Kids will go to bed hungry or they will be unable to go to a doctor because Republicans say: Well, reopen the government, and then we will talk about healthcare insurance coverage.

We should be talking about it right now because families are making decisions about whether they can afford health insurance right now on the open markets that are ongoing right now, and they can’t afford to get sick on Donald Trump’s timetable. Nobody can.

As of Saturday, the regularly appropriated funding for SNAP ended, which left families across the country wondering how they are going to put food on the table. That was when the courts stepped into this crisis. To state the obvious, there is no reason for anyone to go hungry, not just because the courts have ordered that SNAP benefits be provided but because there is a moral imperative in America.

Starvation occurred systematically and ruthlessly as a result of Stalin saying about Ukraine that he was going to take their harvest, kill their livestock, and uproot their gardens in their backyards. He starved millions of people. It was the result of a totalitarian edict. Now, I am not comparing Donald Trump to Stalin, but starvation is not some abstract concept—it is real—and there is a legal obligation in America, as well as a moral obligation, to provide this program.

We do not live in Stalin’s Soviet Union, but we do live in a country that is threatened with the specter of totalitarianism because these kinds of decisions involve defying courts. Donald Trump is defying courts. He is defying laws passed by the Congress and signed by Presidents that provide a legal obligation to use that available money.

This march toward totalitarianism is not theoretical or abstract. Again, I am not drawing any comparison—none—with Stalin’s Soviet Union, but hunger should not be something that we regard as a realistic threat in America. It may exist in other parts of the

world, and we try to provide food to those parts of the world where kids are in danger of going hungry. We ought to do at least the same here for the children of this country.

Democrats have been clear that we will come to the table, negotiate, and reach a solution. It could be done this afternoon if Speaker JOHNSON would bring the House back to town from its paid vacation, if Donald Trump would show leadership and seek a solution, and if Leader THUNE would be a part of that constructive process.

It is not an inevitable consequence that SNAP be shut down. It is a choice. It is a failure. It is a purposeful and conscious failure, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has a moral and a legal obligation to use the vast produce and output of our agricultural system so that we in America can sleep at night with a clear conscience, knowing our country puts feeding hungry children above politics and refuses to use them as pawns.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. LUMMIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO MANUEL HEART

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the leadership of Manuel Heart, who recently retired after serving 15 years as Chairman of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and 27 years on Tribal Council.

Chairman Heart led the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, a sovereign Nation of the Weenuche band of Utes, with reservation land in Southwest Colorado, as well as New Mexico and Utah, with humility, perseverance, and a deep love for his people. Over several decades, Chairman Heart grew from a young council member to a respected statesman in Towaoc and across the Southwest, setting an example for Tribal and non-Tribal leaders alike. He balanced cultural perseverance with forward economic and social progress for the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and dedicated his service to fighting for a better future for all of its members.

As Chairman, he strengthened the Tribe's sovereignty and advanced its voice in State and national policy. He helped establish Bears Ears and Camp Hale National Monuments, raised the voice of tribes in the Colorado River Basin, and advocated for the protection of the Dolores River Basin. He also led the effort to secure full Federal trust status for the Tribe's Pinecrest Ranch in Gunnison County, an area he knows well from countless seasons running the Tribe's cattle below the Uncompahgre Mountains.

It was an honor to work with Chairman Heart over the years. We met many times on the Ute Mountain Ute reservation and across the ancestral homeland of the Ute Tribes in Colorado and Utah. Throughout our time in office together, we have had the pleasure of rafting the Colorado River to discuss water policy and climate change, visiting cultural sites in the Dolores River Basin, and gathering along the Continental Divide to discuss how the Camp Hale National Monument should tell the story of the Ute people and their long ties to that land. He was a regular visitor to my office in Washington, DC, and in 2021, we visited the White House together to celebrate the restoration of the Bears Ears National Monument.

In Towaoc, Chairman Heart led with conviction and compassion. He guided the Tribe through the COVID pandemic, protecting the Tribe's elders and most vulnerable members. He has also sought solutions to on-reservation gun violence and substance abuse issues and advocated for better access to healthcare and law enforcement. He brought that same vision and steadfast leadership to complex water negotiations, where he advocated for the Tribe's right to access and benefit from their full water rights, which are essential to the Ute Mountain Farm and Ranch.

When we wrote the Tribal Access to Clean Water Act, the Chairman testified before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the Federal Government's obligations to provide the Tribe—and all of Indian Country—their sovereign right to access clean, reliable drinking water.

Chairman Heart also understood that the sovereignty of a Tribal nation also lies in the preservation and vitality of culture and language through future generations. He led the effort to create the Kwiayagat Community Academy, the first charter school on a reservation in Colorado, focused on instilling Ute history, language, and culture in children from kindergarten through 5th grade. The academy embodies the exemplary values and leadership style Chairman Heart carried throughout his tenure: prioritizing the health and well-being of the Tribe while looking to the future. It was an honor to visit the school with him and hear the students speak in Ute and share pride in their heritage.

Chairman Heart never let the United States forget its promises to Tribal nations. He ensured that national conversations about water, education, economic development, healthcare, and justice include the voices of sovereign Tribes. He taught me what true government-to-government respect means. I remain deeply grateful for his friendship, his wisdom, and his example.

Colorado and the United States owe Chairman Heart profound gratitude for his decades of service and leadership. We also thank his wife Marie and his entire family for their support of his

leadership. His heart of service for his people has inspired me, and working with him remains one of the greatest honors of my time in the Senate. I wish him well in his retirement as he enjoys well-deserved time with his entire family, including his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO DONNA JEANNE GUNCKEL VILLERE

• Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize Donna Jeanne Gunckel Villere, who is celebrating her birthday on December 1, 2025. She has dedicated her life to family and community service.

Donna was raised in Harahan, LA, and now resides in Metairie. She has been married to Roger Villere for 56 years and is the proud mother of three sons, four granddaughters, two great-grandsons, and two great-granddaughters. Donna and Roger have two more great-grandchildren on the way, one expected in November and another in February. Few things bring her more joy than babysitting her great-grandchildren.

Besides caring for her family, Donna has spent decades mentoring young people. She coached volleyball for nearly 30 years at Lakeshore Playground in Metairie, sharing her love for the game and teaching lessons in teamwork, perseverance, and leadership. She also served as a den leader in the Cub Scouts, where she helped instill the values of integrity and service.

Donna's commitment to her family and community is inspiring. On behalf of the people of Louisiana and all Americans, I wish Donna Villere a happy birthday. May her birthday celebration be filled with love, joy, and appreciation.●

RECOGNIZING IRON HORSE AVIATION

• Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, as chair of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, each week I recognize an outstanding Iowa small business that exemplifies the American entrepreneurial spirit. This week, it is my privilege to honor Iron Horse Aviation of Jasper County, IA, as the Senate Small Business of the Week for National Veterans Small Business Week.

Founded in October 2016, Iron Horse Aviation of Newton, IA, is a veteran-owned aviation company built on faith, service, and dedication to excellence. Established by husband and wife Colt and Emily Zesch, Iron Horse Aviation provides a wide range of aerial services, including pipeline and powerline patrol, frost control and drying, firefighting support, construction assistance, aerial photography, airborne tactical operations, and cattle mustering—just to name a few. With its