

word of a man who will change his story or shift blame or hide the truth at the drop of a hat? The answer is, we cannot trust him.

Pete Hegseth is not qualified to serve as Secretary of Defense. Our brave troops need much better than Pete Hegseth.

#### NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today, on nominations, Republicans will move forward with a Trojan horse of a nominee package, confirming in one fell swoop a slew of horribly unqualified, shockingly radical nominees.

All year long, Senate Republicans have bent the knee to Donald Trump, giving him every nominee he has asked for, no matter how unqualified, no matter how unfit they are, no matter how bad this nominee package is. It is much different than any nominee package we have seen.

Democrats oppose these people, as you will see in a minute, because they are just totally unqualified to be in the important positions he is trying to place them in. No wonder the Republicans didn't want to have votes on these people, didn't want to have discussion, because when the American people learn who they are, they are aghast that these types of people would be appointed.

So, yes, Democrats want votes. We want at least an hour or two of discussion to fill these important positions.

Leader THUNE said, oh, we are just doing this for partisan political reasons. Here is what he said exactly. He said: Democrats must be doing one of two things. THUNE said: Either the President has been nominating historically bad nominees, or Democrats are simply being partisan.

Well, Speaker THUNE, Leader THUNE, that is obvious, Leader THUNE: It is that Donald Trump is nominating historically bad nominees. That is why we are doing this.

I mean, there are so many. I could spend hours on the floor talking about them. But let me mention a few, just a few, and when you hear what is going on, America, you will be aghast.

Look at the nomination of Sara Bailey to serve as Director of National Drug Control Policy. They are trying to sneak this one through. Of course they would be afraid of a discussion or a vote or who she is coming to light. Bailey has no background in medicine, no background in public health, no background in law enforcement. She is so radical—Bailey is—that even FOX News's news shows banned her.

But do you know what she has going for her? why she was nominated for an important position with no experience? She said the January 6 rioters were "good Americans." That was her ticket to getting this job. All you have to do is tell Donald Trump he was right about January 6, even though he was so obviously wrong and dangerous in what he did then. But all you have to do is

tell him "Oh, they were good Americans," and that is good enough for Donald Trump. And now Senate Republicans have gone down to his level, and it is good enough for them.

Republicans are also trying to sneak through people like Anthony D'Esposito to be the inspector general—the watchdog—of the Department of Labor. This is a former Member of the House who put his mistress on his congressional payroll and has faced a slew of misconduct allegations as a police officer. That is not anyone's definition of a good watchdog—unless you are Senate Republicans. Someone who faced misconduct allegations and put his mistress on the payroll is now the watchdog at the Department of Labor? Give me a break.

Of course they want to hide these nominees. They are embarrassed about them. They know that Donald Trump has the lowest standard of any President we have ever seen for qualifications to important positions.

There is John Bartrum, who Republicans want to appoint as Under Secretary for Health at the Department of Veterans Affairs. What is his claim to fame? He was instrumental in firing VA staff, tearing up VA contracts, and politicizing VA research.

That is just three. There are so many more that are just appalling. Yeah, we Democrats of course want to see votes on these nominees. We don't want to allow them to just be all voted yes in a big package so their lack of qualification, their lack of honor, their lack of honesty, their past records can be hidden.

But Republicans are ashamed—ashamed—of who they have to vote for.

They should vote against these nominees, but they are afraid of Donald Trump. It is very clear what Republicans are doing. They are trying to pull a fast one on the American people and sneak through an entire henhouse of bad nominees without giving them the scrutiny that the American people demand.

You know, when you choose bad nominees, you pay a price. Trump picked Hegseth for Secretary of Defense, whom I talked about a few minutes ago. He had no qualifications to be Secretary of Defense. The only way he got through was arm-twisting from some Republicans who knew he shouldn't be in that position, and now Trump and the administration and Senate Republicans who voted for him are paying a price because it is so obvious he is screwing up left and right.

When you put in these bad nominees, you sneak them through or bludgeon them through, the administration and, unfortunately, the American people pay a very significant price. This nominee package is a perfect symbol of what this majority has been about from day one: bowing to Donald Trump, rubberstamping his unqualified loyalists, and chipping away at the Senate's role as a check on a highly abusive Executive.

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

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

#### WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call in relation to Executive Calendar No. 3, S. Res. 520.

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

#### HEALTHCARE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, you just heard the minority leader. He came to the floor, and he said that the Democrats want a 3-year extension—3 full years—for Biden's COVID bonus payments with absolutely no change to the law; not a single reform to deal with the waste, the fraud, the abuse, and the corruption of these payments from ObamaCare, not a single one. They want to send billions of dollars—actually, it is likely to be \$100 billion—directly from the U.S. Treasury to insurance companies. Insurance companies are highly profitable, and that is their position: just send more U.S. dollars to insurance companies, just do a direct transfer of money.

Should I remind him—does he need to be reminded that the COVID problems are over? But they want to send another \$100 billion of Biden COVID bonus payments directly to insurance companies.

Remember, the Democrats shut down the Government of the United States for 43 days because of healthcare, because of ObamaCare. Actually, they wanted, at one point, to give money to illegal immigrants for healthcare. That was part of their demands, free healthcare for illegal immigrants, shut down the government, deny the American people the services they need, transportation, all of those things.

Think of the damage they did to the economy, the damage they did to the country by forcing the American people—43 days of the politics of pain and now the ongoing pain of having to live under ObamaCare with this failed healthcare system that we are living with today.

ObamaCare is a program that undermined healthcare in America. Democrats are saying they want to talk about ObamaCare. Let's talk about what has happened for the last 15 years. I am a doctor. I practiced medicine for 24 years in Wyoming before coming to the U.S. Senate. The Democrats refused to tell the American people—refused to even admit it to themselves, living in denial—that ObamaCare is broken, and it broke

healthcare in America. ObamaCare is a failure. ObamaCare is unaffordable.

Let me point out, not a single Republican voted for ObamaCare, not one. Premiums for people on ObamaCare have gone up over 220 percent since ObamaCare became law 15 years ago. For people that have ObamaCare, their deductibles have doubled. A family of four now pays \$10,000 more for the coverage today than it did before ObamaCare.

Competition for selling insurance in the United States has collapsed. In rural counties in my home State of Wyoming, your home State, Mr. President, of Oklahoma, people lost so many of the options they had to buy insurance. The insurance providers have dried up. Today, many counties are left with one provider only for people to buy from. Some counties have none. Rural hospitals are struggling.

More than 100 rural hospitals have closed since ObamaCare became law. Hundreds more are at risk because of the devastating effect of ObamaCare on healthcare in our Nation.

Let's go back and recall what President Obama told the Nation as he was promoting ObamaCare and every one of the Democrats voted for it, every single one of them. He said: If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor. He said: If you like your policy, you can keep your policy. These are the things that the President of the United States told the American people when Obama was in the White House. He went on to say probably the biggest lie of all. He said your insurance premiums would go down by \$2,500 a year for families.

Every single one of these was a lie. The American people see it. The American people—even the New York Times said that "ObamaCare is pricey." They said that about a month ago. The Washington Post admitted that ObamaCare was never affordable. These aren't my words; these are the words of the New York Times and the Washington Post.

How do Democrats continue to cover up the failure, to continue to mislead the American people? They tried to do it with government subsidies. They tried to cover up the failures of ObamaCare with government-paid subsidies—not to the American people but directly to the American insurance companies.

When they found out those subsidies weren't enough, what did they do when those juicy subsidies weren't carrying the day? They said: Let's add new subsidies on top of it, which is what they are talking about extending. Those new juicier subsidies today, they want to extend those for 3 more years.

They put them in place during COVID. They called them the Biden COVID bonus subsidies. Now they want to make them permanent. They want to extend them 3 years. Now they want to make them permanent, have the American people—have the Treasury of the United States send more money to

insurance companies as the cost of healthcare continues to climb.

When Biden was President, Democrats created these Biden COVID bonuses, new subsidies, added on top to prop up ObamaCare because it was falling. ObamaCare was toppling. Democrats said: We can't have this. Let's send hundreds of billions of more dollars to insurance companies.

Let's be very clear: The money does not go to the American people. It is a main line straight from the U.S. Government Treasury into the bank accounts of big insurance companies. The American people, the consumers, are cut out of the equation. American consumers have no way to say how the money is spent, and they need to have a voice in this. They have the government writing big checks.

There is no incentive to control costs. Zero incentive to compete. As a result, insurance companies continue to raise premiums as high as they want, and their profits continue to go up.

These increases aren't because the Biden COVID bonuses are expiring, although that is what the Democrats are trying to say. Remember, Democrats chose the date of the expiring of these subsidies when they put this into law in 2022. That is what they did. They had the House, Senate, White House and said: We are going to put more money in—even they realized COVID was going to be done by the end of this year—so they set this up as an expiring date. Now they realize: Oh, no, ObamaCare continues to topple over. We need to prop it up with more government money to insurance companies.

The end of these Biden COVID bonuses explain about 4 percent of next year's projected 20-percent spike in insurance premiums. These huge premium increases explain why the stock prices of insurance companies have soared for 500 to 1,000 percent since ObamaCare became law. That is what we are seeing. That is the reality of this. Big insurance companies, not the American people, are whom the Democrats continue to support financially.

Democrats created a system with zero accountability. Now they want to extend this broken system with these additional subsidies for another 3 years with zero reforms, nothing. They are not going after the waste, not going after the fraud, not going after the abuse. Oh, no, Democrats are happy paying massive subsidies, and for everybody, for people making over a quarter of a million dollars a year, people making over half a million dollars a year. Nope, keep sending the money over to the insurance companies for all their rich, fat-cat friends.

The Biden COVID bonuses are not improving patient care, I will tell you that as a doctor. For every taxpayer dollar spent on these subsidies, Americans believe they get about 34 cents of value. Where does the rest of the money go? Waste, fraud, abuse, and, yes, corruption.

How do we know there is corruption? Last year, the American people filed over 200,000 complaints with the Federal Government about that specific thing. They complained because they were unknowingly signed up or switched into ObamaCare plans, things they didn't choose, they didn't want, they didn't ask for. Those are 200,000 that complained. How many more were there that didn't know about it or didn't know enough or whom to complain to? Insurers signed up individuals for insurance plans they didn't even know they had. Biden COVID bonuses are an expensive, fraud-ridden failure, and the Democrats want to extend them for another 3 years.

Continuing to pour billions of dollars more into the pockets of big insurance companies without meaningful protection against fraud will not lower costs in healthcare. It will not help the American people. Republicans believe Americans deserve high-quality affordable care. It is not what people got under ObamaCare, not at all.

Republicans believe taxpayer dollars should go directly to hard-working people, not to the big insurance companies. Give buying power to the people. Let people make decisions. I trust the American people. You want to empower Americans to make their own decisions about healthcare, certainly, and about their own families and what the needs are for their family, what is right for them.

There is a clear divide between the Democrats and Republicans on healthcare. And on one side of the aisle, you have Democrats protecting a broken system with not a single plan to lower costs. On this side of the aisle, we have Republicans fighting to give people what they wanted all along, the care they need from a doctor they choose, at a price they can afford.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The Senator from Massachusetts.

#### 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, this past Saturday marked 50 years since the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975.

Before IDEA, children with disabilities were often institutionalized or excluded from classrooms, deprived of the support needed to achieve their God-given potential. IDEA changed that by guaranteeing every child, regardless of ability, the right to a free and appropriate public education.

The IDEA said that every child—every child—is worthy of reaching their full potential and that the Federal Government ought to provide the resources to make that possible.

Massachusetts, the birthplace of public education, first passed a State law, section 766, which established the high legal standard that would be adapted