

your wish, and we get the accountability we need.

And for these reasons, I ask unanimous consent that, as if in legislative session and notwithstanding rule XXII, the Finance Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 3391 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; I ask further that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be made laid and upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

Ms. BALDWIN. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I am going to make just a few brief points in response to my colleague Senator HUSTED's proposal.

This bill is part and parcel of what we have seen for years from the Republican Party—an attempt to undermine the Affordable Care Act in its entirety.

If this bill became law, it would undoubtedly still kick millions of people off their ACA coverage.

When Americans are calling out for help to lower costs, this bill would actually increase premiums by an average of over \$1,000 for over 10 million people annually. And if that is not enough, Senator HUSTED's bill sneaks in another attack on women's right to control their own bodies, and it bans Marketplace insurance coverage of abortion.

I will end with this: I have worked on this policy for a long, long time. I care deeply about affordable healthcare and have been willing to work with anyone to deliver results for the people I represent. But the place for this debate—perhaps this offering—should have been this past June during the debate on President Trump's signature legislation, a major tax bill that disproportionately sends its benefits to the wealthiest among us. That is where we should have had an extensive debate on extending a tax break for working families and individuals to be able to afford their healthcare premiums, and if not during that debate, we should have been working across the aisle on this in the lead-up to the expiration of the last CR on September 30, the end of the last fiscal year.

But it is 5 days before the expiration of open enrollment—5 days. People have been shopping since November 1. They have seen what their costs were this past year, and they have seen what their costs are going to be next year.

I, along with my Democratic colleagues, have been pleading with Republicans to come to the table and negotiate on this and, by and large, they have refused. And then yesterday, just 1 day before we vote on a clean 3-year extension, we get this bill out of the blue. This bill is a deeply unserious proposal to a very serious problem. And, therefore, Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. HUSTED. Mr. President, I appreciate my colleague's thoughts.

I haven't been here for years. I didn't create this. I haven't been here for years trying to undermine ObamaCare. I have been here for less than a year.

And this isn't unserious; I am very serious. This represents a compromise. My Democrat colleagues want an extension of the ACA tax credits; I am offering that. All I am asking for in return is that we eliminate the fraud—the kind of fraud that we had in Minneapolis going on right now where we don't have proper oversight of our generous taxpayer-supported programs.

I will just say specifically, though, that the proposal I am offering is more generous than the original ACA Program on tax credits, and it has nothing to do with women's rights because it doesn't ban any of it. It just says that the taxpayers don't pay for it, which has been, since the 1970s, the way this institution has operated as it relates to the Hyde amendment.

The time to work on it was last June. We offered something on CSRs last June, but it was objected to by the Democrats under the Byrd rule. It was offered. Cost-share reductions—we offered it last June, but my Democrat colleagues objected to it.

Yes, I agree, there are only 5 days, maybe longer if we want to spend a little time. And time is of the essence, so that is why we shouldn't waste any more of it. We should pass this legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

#### NOMINATION OF THOMAS BELL

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, families across the country are struggling with skyrocketing costs—health costs, grocery costs, energy costs—but instead of working to address these challenges, Republicans are bringing yet another disastrous Trump nominee forward to support his agenda.

Thomas March Bell has been nominated to be the independent watchdog at America's health Agency. There could not be a more dangerous choice for this position.

I have long believed in the bipartisan coalition that works here to defend the integrity and the independence of the inspectors general.

Senator GRASSLEY once said:

Inspectors General are intended to be equal opportunity investigators and are designed to combat waste, fraud, abuse and misconduct . . . without regard to political affiliation. They are the ultimate [drainers of the swamp].

One of Donald Trump's very first acts after taking office was to fire these independent investigators. In less than a year, he has gutted the integrity and independence of these Offices.

A few years ago, this body overwhelmingly passed a law to secure the independence of the inspectors general in government, but 4 days into his second term, Donald Trump threw that

law into the dumpster. He unlawfully fired nearly two dozen inspectors general across the government. Now he is replacing them with a wave of partisan operatives who stand ready to sabotage the independent oversight of inspectors general. Meanwhile, it has been crickets from Republicans. They are just happy to let him do it.

No nominee has exemplified the assault on independent oversight quite like March Bell, the nominee to serve as Health and Human Services inspector general.

I would be remiss if I didn't start off by noting that he is nominated to fill a position that is not legally vacant. He is nominated to fill the role of an inspector general that was illegally fired by Donald Trump.

My Democratic colleagues and I on the Finance Committee urged Chairman CRAPO to pause this nomination. It was met with radio silence. Now Republicans are pushing him through, unbothered by Donald Trump's complete disregard for the law that almost every one of them voted for just a few years ago. How times change.

Let me talk about Mr. Bell's supposed qualifications. Once in a while, I get called a privacy hawk, and I never consider that an insult. I have worked for decades, often with my Republican colleagues, to safeguard the privacy of Oregonians and all Americans. I have come to believe there are few places where privacy is more important than in the healthcare system. That is why this nomination is so dangerous for HHS.

Mr. Bell has made a career out of plastering people's private information in so many places, everywhere he can make it stick. When he was chief counsel for a select House panel, he made public a slew of information on reproductive healthcare providers and patients that he targeted with a sham investigation, all while they were being subjected to threats and physical harm.

Staff and even Members of Congress raised multiple concerns about his behavior during this investigation. He couldn't care a lick.

Those patients and providers saw a ninefold increase in violent threats during his investigation.

When my staff asked Mr. Bell what steps he took to protect the targets of this critical investigation, he replied: "None." That is unacceptable.

I also note that the entire investigation was based on doctored, manipulated, and sometimes downright fabricated evidence, much of which he got from a personal connection.

This wasn't oversight; this was raw partisanship intended to target and intimidate reproductive health providers and the women seeking their care.

This is shocking behavior from the person nominated to oversee the privacy and protection of the private health information of Americans, but that is Mr. Bell's bread and butter. In questions for the record following his

nomination hearing, he refused to admit that Joe Biden won the 2020 Presidential election. An inspector general needs a firmer grasp of reality than this.

Even now, while he is nominated for a role that requires resolute independence, he is leading another sham investigation. This time, he is looking at ActBlue. This is nothing more than Donald Trump weaponizing the Federal Government to target political opponents with political enforcers. Instead of serving the American people, he is focused on carrying out the Trump agenda.

If my colleagues think that this blatant partisanship is going to stop if he is confirmed as an independent inspector general, they are betting on the wrong horse. When Mr. Bell came before the Finance Committee, he said that he "will examine, evaluate, audit, and investigate to support the initiatives of President Trump and Secretary Kennedy." Last time I looked, an inspector general isn't there to follow the President's marching orders; they are there to make sure that the train stays on track and that nobody is out there pilfering the boxcars.

Mr. Bell has spent his whole career as a partisan operative. His confirmation will be a blank check to continue to make the healthcare system more expensive, more exclusionary, and less effective. It will all be done at the expense of the American people. This goes beyond the fox guarding the henhouse; it is giving the fox free rein to investigate henhouses from coast to coast. And while that might be the MO of this administration, it is dangerous for the American people, and it is exactly the opposite of what Congress set up inspectors general to do.

By confirming Mr. Bell, the Republicans send yet another strong message to Donald Trump that he can use the Federal Government to settle personal scores.

I urge my colleagues to respect the laws that we passed here and to respect the privacy, the decency, and the safety of patients and providers. I urge my colleagues to vote no on the dangerous Bell nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

#### HEALTHCARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, right now, families are trying to get health coverage for next year—a few weeks away—and they are coming face to face with the MAGA healthcare hike. That is not some theory or talking point; that is the stone-cold reality. Just talk to folks back home, and they will tell you that premiums are doubling, on average, for people losing the ACA-enhanced premium tax credits. In some cases, they are tripling or quadrupling or even worse.

I have heard from seniors who will see their premium jump more than \$1,000 a month. I have heard from a family in Washington State whose premium will jump \$2,000 a month.

A new KFF poll found that one in four people will just go without health coverage if their premium doubles. Again, that is the average increase families are facing because of Republican inaction.

That is the reality we are staring down this very moment. This is hitting seniors who are too young for Medicare but can't afford to roll the dice on their health. This is hitting small businesses that rely on the exchanges and tax credits to get coverage for themselves and their employees. It is hitting farmers, many of whom are covered on the exchanges.

I have to say, the reason that I call this the MAGA healthcare hike is because it is going to hit MAGA States the hardest, even as Trump calls affordability a scam. The 10 States where premiums are jumping by the highest percentage are all Republican States, every single one. The vast majority of these dollars go to Republican States, and yet the vast majority of my Republican colleagues couldn't be bothered when it came to saving the health tax credits and stopping folks back home from losing their coverage.

Not only are most Republicans not serious about stopping the MAGA healthcare hike, many of them are cheering it on. You don't have to take my word for it. Just look at what Republican leaders said about saving the healthcare tax credits earlier this year. Republican leaders said, and I quote, nothing—nothing. Or just look at the only healthcare plan Republicans ever rallied around: cutting \$1 trillion from healthcare. Or just listen to Speaker JOHNSON argue that Republicans strengthened healthcare by making the biggest cut in Medicaid in history. That is like saying you strengthened the ship by throwing the passengers overboard. That is the one thing they all agree on. That is the one health policy they are all proud of. Do Republicans want an award for all the hospitals that are now going to shutter? Do they want a thank-you card from all the families that are getting priced out of their health coverage?

Another clear sign Republicans are not serious about healthcare: Their message has been all over the place, everywhere from hypocritical, to nonsensical, to straight-up lies.

One of the first Republican talking points we saw was the outright lie that all this money is for illegal immigrants. Their latest spin is just as ridiculous because now Republicans—the same party that proudly brought you the biggest billionaire tax giveaway in the history of our country—the same Republicans who have never met a corporate CEO they didn't want to shower with tax cuts are scandalized to learn that health insurance is provided by health insurance companies. That is pretty darn rich.

When Republicans were just giving money away this summer—literally a billionaire free-for-all—it was so important that they cut healthcare. But

when Democrats want to help families buy healthcare coverage, that is a bridge too far.

If Republicans—the party of Trump and Elon Musk—want to play who is buddies with billionaires, go ahead; make my day. Remember, Republicans made tax breaks for billionaires permanent—permanent. They exploded the national debt by trillions to do it. They cut healthcare to do that. And they pretended that it cost zero dollars by using ridiculous, make-believe budget gimmicks. But saving healthcare for a few years is too expensive?

Republicans don't see anything outrageous about Trump shoveling billions of dollars at Argentina? They have no objection with a new private jet for Secretary Noem or bulldozing the White House for Trump's latest gold-plated vanity project, but they can't imagine making sure their own constituents have healthcare?

And, please, when Republicans try to pretend it is unthinkable we want to do this for 3 years, don't forget they already voted down doing it for 1 year. In fact, one Republican actually called it "political terrorism." Give me a break. Trump can post a video where he bombs protesters with feces. He can repost someone calling to hang Democrats. But when Democrats want to save healthcare for working families, that is political terrorism?

Let's not forget one of the most incredible Republican excuses for letting these premiums double—that they never wanted to lower healthcare costs with these tax credits in the first place.

They say: Look, Democrats passed these tax credits without a single Republican vote.

Well, you bet we did, and that really shows the differences in priorities, doesn't it?

When Democrats were in power, we passed the strongest, longest tax credit we had the votes for to help working families get healthcare because Democrats actually think it is a problem that millions of people are going to lose coverage. But Republicans think the real problem is that too many people were able to get coverage in the first place. They are even doubling down on that in their new, half-baked proposal to pretend they have some kind of healthcare agenda.

Just look at the ideas that Republicans are putting forward. The Republican healthcare plan is to bring back—back—the bad old days of high-risk pools, when preexisting conditions were not protected and a cancer diagnosis meant you couldn't get health coverage.

The Republicans' healthcare plan is more junk health plans that bury patients in debt when they have an accident or they get sick. The Republican plan is finding new ways to attack access to abortion and block women from getting the care that they need. The Republican healthcare plan is "just let mom shop around for healthcare," as if