

Senate, I ask that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of my colleagues.

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

The Senator from Delaware.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER. Mr. President, on the eve of the vote for the nominee for the Department of Health and Human Services, I stand before you acknowledging that I will vote no on the confirmation of Mr. Robert F. Kennedy.

I stand before you tonight after looking at his abilities, his background and qualifications, and his character. For me, I listened to my constituents and the calls that we have received into our office. And I have read articles. I have looked at petitions and lawsuits. I have listened to podcasts, and even watched a video that he produced.

There were inconsistencies in his positions, and so that is one reason that I could say no to this candidate.

Even as the former deputy secretary of health and social services from Delaware, I thought about the potential for another pandemic in our country and would he be ready for the job?

I thought about the fact that I come from a State that is also an agriculture State, and we are right now dealing with issues and concerns and fears about avian flu. Would he be ready for the job?

I have thought about senior citizens in my State who are on Medicare and children with special needs who may be on Medicaid, and the fact that in our hearing and also in my one-on-one conversation with him, he confused the two. Even within a week's time, he did not learn the differences between the two.

That was concerning enough, but tonight, in the time that I have, I want to also say I stand here as a grandmother, and I think about my granddaughter Lennox and her ability to, No. 1, be safe in school, because she is vaccinated, and she is with other children who are vaccinated and no longer have to worry about things like polio. I think about her ability to have reproductive freedom over her own life, when Mr. Kennedy has changed his positions so many times on where he stands on reproductive freedom and the right for her to choose what she wants for her life.

But I think one of the most troubling things that took place during our meeting was that he was not familiar with the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, EMTALA, while we literally have a crisis in maternal mortality. It is important to me that the person who holds this job understands those basic things—Medicare, Medicaid, EMTALA—and that we face a challenge for women's lives being saved.

I asked him specifically if he agreed about making sure that, if someone

was having complications during their pregnancy, that they should get the care that they need. This is both something that is being experienced across the country, but it is also personal for me.

A few years ago, after my son and daughter-in-law went through so much to get pregnant through IVF, on Christmas morning, I remember beginning to make the family dinner, and I got a call from my daughter-in-law saying: Mom, something is wrong. My water broke.

She was only about 5, 6 months pregnant—about 5 months pregnant. And she went to a hospital. And I got to that hospital, and because I knew, from my former jobs, of the statistics, particularly for Black women and maternal deaths—I saw her sitting in a wheelchair in the waiting room not being attended. The hospital ended up telling her she needed to go home and just basically wait it out.

For that whole month afterward, my son and my daughter-in-law stayed in my house. They slept in my bed. We supported each other.

But because of the miracle of IVF, they were able to conceive again, and 2 years ago this weekend, I became a grandmother of my granddaughter Lennox.

Tonight, I stand here on behalf of the children who want and need to be healthy. I stand here on behalf of the women across the country who need to know that there is a Cabinet Secretary who understands the need for emergency care, who understands the rights of women to make choices with their doctors and their families, and, if they have a pastor or a rabbi, with their rabbi and their pastor.

As someone who has focused much of my career on health and social services and dealing with health disparities, it is important that we do better as a country with our health status and that we are healthier.

But I go back to the beginning. Does the candidate have the qualifications, the background, the character, and the ability? For this candidate, unfortunately, the answer is no.

And tonight, I stand here for all of the children of our country, all of the families of our country, and I will be voting no on this nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I am joining my Democratic colleagues on the Senate floor today because we have pledged to Americans that we will always stand up and fight for affordable, quality healthcare.

Right now, Donald Trump and his Republican allies in Congress are trying to dismantle healthcare access for Nevadans and Americans across the country. As we speak, Republicans are

working out a way to pass their budget through Congress and slash Medicaid to pay for tax cuts for Trump's ultrawealthy friends. Their budget for these billionaire tax cuts was just released this morning, and they want to give away trillions of dollars to the richest Americans and add about \$3 trillion to our national debt in exchange for nearly \$1 trillion in healthcare cuts for working families. You can bet Medicaid will be one of their biggest targets.

It is absolutely outrageous, and it is important that we shine a light for the American public so they know what is going on.

Right now, the Senate is considering the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., to lead the Department of Health and Human Services—who has made it clear that he will be a rubberstamp for Donald Trump even if it hurts Nevadans.

This isn't fearmongering or speaking in hypotheticals. Donald Trump has been coming after critical healthcare since his first term in office. Every annual budget proposal Trump had in his first term, from 2017 through 2020, included huge cuts to Medicaid. And when Republicans in Congress tried to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, President Trump was on board with every plan they came up with that slashed Medicaid in the process.

I will tell you what: Democrats stood up to him every time.

But even after multiple failed attempts, it doesn't seem like President Trump has learned that Americans don't want him to roll back Medicaid.

His Project 2025 manifesto calls for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to impose lifetime caps on Medicaid. What does that mean? That means a person can only receive Medicaid benefits for a limited period of time no matter their income or their healthcare needs. That would leave about 92,800 Nevadans who are low-income and depend on Medicaid for healthcare at risk of losing their coverage.

We know RFK, Jr., will just let this happen if he becomes the Secretary of Health and Human Services. HHS oversees the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which means Mr. Kennedy would have control over what happens with these essential healthcare programs.

What is ironic is that Mr. Kennedy doesn't seem to even know the difference between Medicare and Medicaid. He confused the two multiple times during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee.

Also during that hearing, he made it very clear to me and he made it very clear to the general public who was watching that he would refuse to even tell me he wouldn't be a rubberstamp for this administration, that he could have an independent thought and fight any harm that would occur to Nevadans or across this country; he would stand up with them. He made it very

clear that he would not, that he would stand with Donald Trump.

I cannot support someone who would let Donald Trump give his billionaire friends tax cuts at the expense of Nevadans' healthcare.

I know some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have argued that their plan to cut Medicaid is about getting rid of waste and fraud. Listen, I am all for reducing government waste and fraud and streamlining our bureaucracy.

I will tell you, I served for 8 years as the attorney general in the State of Nevada, and during that period of time, the Medicaid Fraud Unit was in my office. We prosecuted and we went after individuals, and we held people accountable for that waste and fraud in the Medicaid Program. So I am all about addressing waste and fraud. In fact, I know that my Democratic colleagues and I have offered to work in a bipartisan way to cut wasteful spending.

Instead, however, Trump and Republican leadership want to gut Medicaid, which millions of Americans depend on to access healthcare. It is just wrong. But let me talk about why. Let me tell you a little bit about the history of this.

Medicaid was created in 1965 as a way for the Federal and State governments to provide healthcare coverage to low-income people who need it. That includes children, pregnant women, seniors, people with disabilities, and adults across the United States. It helps veterans, new moms and their babies, rural hospitals, primary care providers, mental health care workers, and more.

As of June 2024, 788,481 Nevadans were enrolled in Medicaid and its initiatives, like the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP. Nearly 800,000 people in Nevada—and that is just Nevada—depend on Medicaid to keep themselves and their families healthy. This includes one in six adults, three out of eight children, four in seven nursing home residents, and one-third of people with disabilities. Forty-three percent of our births are covered by Medicaid.

But here is the deal: Sixty-six percent of adults in Nevada who benefit from Medicaid work for a living.

I cannot say enough about this program and its impact in my State and how important it is. People over the age of 65 and disabled rely on Medicaid for their long-term care, and people with disabilities rely on Medicaid for their long-term care.

Let me say that there are seniors who helped build this country and make America what it is today. They worked hard, they raised their families, and they contributed to our economy. Some are veterans of our Armed Forces. Now in their senior years, they have chronic illnesses, and they aren't able to move around the house like they used to. They cannot take care of themselves alone. That is what Medicaid is for.

In Nevada, 17,600 Medicaid enrollees used home- and community-based services and long-term services to support themselves. That means nursing facility care, adult daycare programs, home health aide services, personal care services, transportation, and supported employment.

It is a common misconception that Medicare and private insurance covers long-term nursing facility care or home care. They just don't. That is Medicaid. That is what Donald Trump and Republican leadership and RFK, Jr., want to cut to thank our seniors for everything they have done for our country. They want to roll back the healthcare benefits that are giving them the dignity they deserve in their retirement.

But that is not all. Medicaid also supports low-income children and working families, including pregnant women and children with disabilities. Nearly 40 percent of all children in Nevada are covered by Medicaid and CHIP. This is a crucial program for Nevada's kids in making sure that they get their annual checkups, vaccines, hospital emergency care, dental and vision care, and the medications they need. All of this—all of this—is key to ensuring that our kids grow and that they develop at a healthy rate.

Medicaid also covers more than 40 percent of all births in Nevada. In 2023, that was 13,206 babies and their mothers who had access to essential healthcare that they wouldn't have been able to afford otherwise. These are the children, babies, mothers who are now being targeted by Donald Trump so he can pay for tax cuts for the ultrarich.

Another key component of Medicaid coverage includes people with mental health challenges and substance use disorders. Nevada Medicaid provides screening and early intervention, outpatient and community services, crisis and emergency response, and residential and inpatient treatment to children and adults.

I know we have a mental health crisis and a drug epidemic in this country. I see it. I hear about it from Nevadans every single day. I think both Democrats and Republicans agree that we are just not dedicating enough resources towards Americans' mental health.

When there is a shooting at a school or place of worship or a music festival, the first thing I hear is that we need to invest more in mental health. And families in both red and blue States are being torn apart by fentanyl and other dangerous drugs.

So why do my Republican colleagues want to do Donald Trump's bidding and slash Medicaid, making this crisis even worse? They are working right now to pass a budget through Congress that guts these critical programs. And they want to confirm Mr. Kennedy, who we know is going to go along with every one of Trump's plans.

If they succeed, what is going to happen to Nevada's working families, our

seniors, our veterans, and our children? What will happen to them if Medicaid is slashed? Well, let me just tell you what is going to happen.

In Nevada, we rely on Federal funding for the vast majority of our Medicaid Program. Without it, policymakers in my State will be forced to cut coverage and leave hundreds of thousands of Nevadans uninsured, without access to affordable, quality healthcare. I said it before. Nearly 800,000 Nevadans who have Medicaid now will be in danger of being kicked off their health insurance, and 17,600 seniors and disabled people in Nevada will be at risk of losing their coverage, leaving even more families with nowhere to turn to take care of their elderly loved ones.

When Nevadans lose their coverage, the already-expensive cost of healthcare shoots up. Nevada Health Link has a list of costs for people without health insurance. Let me tell you what that looks like now if they were no longer to have the benefit of Medicaid.

Mammograms will cost \$212 now. Brain MRIs have a copay of \$20 to \$100 with insurance, but it will become \$1,000 to \$5,000 without insurance. A visit to the emergency room will cost Nevadans who are insured a \$50 to a \$150 copay, but Nevadans who don't have insurance could pay as much as \$3,000. A baby's visit to the doctor for a wellness checkup costs \$10 to \$30 if they have insurance, but without insurance, it costs about \$95 per visit.

These are the kinds of costs the average Nevada family cannot afford to pay, but Donald Trump is threatening to make this a reality.

If Donald Trump cuts health insurance in Nevada, even more healthcare providers may be forced to close up shop because their patients can't pay for their care.

Let me just stress this even more: Nevada's rural hospitals rely heavily on Medicaid. If Medicaid is cut, these hospitals that are already understaffed and overwhelmed would have to reduce their services, if not shut down entirely.

Now, that is not unique to Nevada. Every rural community that relies on Medicaid is going to have the same problem. If you know our rural communities, you know that very rarely is there access to healthcare in a rural community, and when those providers are there, that is the place for our rural Americans to go. Sometimes they have to drive, in my State, 2 to 3 to 4 hours just to get access to healthcare. If we take away those areas and the locations for healthcare in our rural communities, that will devastate rural Americans.

The reality is, in Nevada, we just don't have enough providers in our Medicaid Program. It is one thing to have a clinic open that door; it is another to have a hospital be able to open those doors to communities. But if you

don't have the providers, that is essentially shutting down healthcare for individuals and people across this country.

I will say my State is working to build out networks and encourage providers to come to Nevada, but we can't do it without critical funding from Medicaid. If Donald Trump cuts Medicaid, one of the first things my State will have to do is cut payment rates for healthcare providers, which will make our shortage of providers even worse, and it will disincentivize providers coming to live and work in Nevada. The ripple effect it will have on my State's economy will be disastrous. We just can't let this happen. This is going to affect Americans in every State across the country.

We have to come together as a Congress and protect our working families from Donald Trump's billionaire tax cuts, and that includes voting no on RFK, Jr., whom Trump handpicked to lead HHS because he knew Mr. Kennedy wouldn't do a thing to stop him.

With RFK running our Department of Health and Human Services, it is not just Medicaid that is in danger; Trump also wants to dismantle the Affordable Care Act. As we all may remember, he has concepts of a plan to do just that, but let's talk about what that means.

Before the ACA, if you were an adult with no dependents, even if you were low-income, you had no access to Medicaid. Unless your employer provided health insurance, you had none. Now, thanks to the ACA, more people than ever before can get the healthcare they need. Over the last 11 years, that has amounted to 20 million low-income adults enrolling in affordable, quality healthcare coverage through Medicaid. This has been a huge gift to our economy.

Think of it this way: If you were an adult who had a chronic illness that kept you from working, you didn't used to have access to health insurance, but because of the ACA, you can now get the care and treatment you need and get back into the workforce.

The ACA has helped Medicaid support our workers to boost our healthcare workforce, and it has made us a stronger and healthier nation. But, once again, Donald Trump wants to roll this expansion of Medicaid back and strip healthcare from thousands of Nevadans so he can pay for tax cuts for his elite, billionaire friends.

Well, I don't know about my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, but I have no interest in cutting taxes for the ultrawealthy when we should be cutting taxes for working families. Here is how we can do that: Part of the Affordable Care Act provided tax credits for low-income Nevadans to make their healthcare premiums cheaper and help them afford their insurance. When we passed the bipartisan American Rescue Plan and the Inflation Reduction Act, we made those tax credits available to even more people, especially to those who had been impacted

by the COVID-19 pandemic. But now those tax credits for hard-working families are set to expire at the end of this year.

This would be devastating to Nevada families and small businesses, as 11,000 Nevadans would lose their healthcare coverage. Nevadans who have benefited from these tax credits would see their healthcare premiums go up by \$2,000 a year, on average, and 250,606 small businesses and self-employed workers in Nevada who qualified for these tax credits will see their premiums increase.

I will tell you what: My Republican colleagues in the majority now have a decision to make. Instead of letting these tax credits for working families and small businesses expire and throwing thousands of lives into chaos, they could renew them. It should be simple. Let's come together and prioritize hard-working families and small businesses over billionaires. That is what we were elected to do, and it is what the American people expect of us.

We cannot give our country over to the elite—to the wealthiest people like Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.—who will do whatever President Trump wants him to do to our healthcare system.

My Democratic colleagues and I stand here today and every day ready to continue pushing back against Donald Trump's attacks on Americans' healthcare. Trump can say whatever he wants about not touching Medicaid and making America healthy, but the truth is that he will do whatever it takes to lift up his elite, billionaire friends and then tell you it is for your own good. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., will be just a rubberstamp for that agenda. Because of that, I will be voting no on his confirmation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The Democratic leader.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, unfortunately and sadly, we are witnessing an alarming abdication of duty from Republicans here in the Senate. The job of the Senate when it comes to nominees is very simple: When a nominee is obviously qualified and experienced, we should consider them seriously even if we don't agree with their political views or ultimately vote for them. But when a nominee comes before the Senate who is obviously unqualified, who is obviously fringe, whose views are obviously detrimental to the well-being of the American people, well, Senators have a duty to reject them and to tell the President to send someone better.

We were faced with one such nominee earlier today in Tulsi Gabbard, and now we are faced with another such nominee right now.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., is not remotely qualified to become the next Secretary of Health and Human Serv-

ices. In fact, I might go further. Robert F. Kennedy might be one of the least qualified people the President could have chosen for the job. It is almost as if Mr. Kennedy's beliefs, history, and background were tailor-made to be the exact opposite of what the job demands.

A few weeks ago, it seemed like maybe Senate Republicans would have drawn the line on nominees like Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and Tulsi Gabbard, but the past few days have been a stunning capitulation by Senate Republicans. At this point, they are just rubberstamping people no matter how fringe they are.

If the Senate had a secret ballot, I will bet you that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., would never have come close to confirmation. His unfitness for the job is simply too obvious and too glaring.

HHS is an Agency that depends on science, on evidence, and on impartiality to ensure the well-being of over 330 million Americans. HHS ensures we eat safe food, purchase reliable medications, oversees Medicare benefits, and approves the use of lifesaving vaccines. Most importantly, a good HHS Secretary makes sure the American people have access to affordable, high-quality healthcare.

Mr. Kennedy, unfortunately, is not qualified to oversee any of these things. He is neither a doctor nor a scientist nor a public health expert nor a policy expert of any kind.

If Mr. Kennedy is confirmed given that lack of background, it is my deep fear that he will rubberstamp Donald Trump's war against healthcare, meaning we will see more of the disastrous funding cuts of the past few weeks, meaning that more people will lose health coverage, meaning that the interests of for-profit corporations and Big Pharma will come before the needs of working Americans.

When I saw Mr. Kennedy and asked him certain views, like on abortion, he said: Well, I am going to defer to the President.

On something as personal, as heart-felt, as talked over within ourselves, even, as abortion, he will follow the whims and the wishes of the President? Well, then, how do we know he won't do it on everything else? Even in the places where he might try to tell someone in an interview that he is different than the President, how do we know he won't just follow the President given that he said that on one of the most fundamental views a person can hold?

I am so troubled by this nomination. Already, as we have seen, community health centers across the country have been locked out of the funding they need to serve patients, and I fear it will get worse under RFK, Jr.'s watch. Already, the CDC has gutted valuable public health care data from its websites before the courts stepped in. As we speak, DOGE has basically hacked into the payment data of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which tens of millions of people rely on for secure benefits. I fear all