murder rates—a 100-year low; and fraudsters are going to jail. That is why today I am rising to support the Protecting American Taxpayers Act.

For years, Washington accepted fraud as the cost of doing business. The government wrote the checks, the fraudsters cashed them, and hard-working Americans were left to foot the bill. Those same hard-working Americans knew intuitively that was driving up their cost of living.

But those days are coming to an end. Under President Trump, we have seen historic momentum to root out waste, fraud, and abuse across the Federal Government. For the first time in a long time, Washington is shining a flashlight on the billions of taxpayer dollars disappearing through fraud, improper payments, and outright criminal activity. Now Congress has the responsibility to finish the job.

The American people are asking a simple question: If Washington knows where the fraud is, why aren't we stopping it? And they are right to ask. Today, an estimated $1.4 billion is stolen from taxpayers every single day. That is money that should be strengthening our military, supporting our veterans, protecting Medicare and Social Security, or reducing the debt we are leaving to our children and our grandchildren. Instead, it is ending up in the hands of organized fraud rings, scam artists, and criminals who have learned exactly where the holes in our Federal Government are.

We are already seeing what happens when the Federal Government makes fraud enforcement a priority. In one of the largest healthcare fraud takedowns in our Nation's history, Federal prosecutors charged hundreds of defendants accused of submitting more than $6 billion in fraudulent claims to Medicare, Medicaid, and other taxpayer-funded health programs. And the best part? People are finally going to jail.

Investigators uncovered transnational criminal organizations, fraudulent medical equipment schemes, and providers accused of billing the government for services that were never provided. These weren't bookkeeping mistakes; they were sophisticated efforts to steal billions from the American taxpayer.

The truth is simple: Fraudsters follow the money, and for too long, Washington has rolled out the welcome mat. This legislation finally starts closing that door. The Protecting American Taxpayers Act is projected to save taxpayers $240 billion—that is $240 billion—by preventing fraud before it happens, recovering stolen taxpayer dollars, and ensuring criminals are held accountable. It doesn't just respond to fraud after the fact; it helps stop it before another billion dollars walks out the door.

One piece of this package that I am proud to see included is my WALZ Act—W-A-L-Z, the WALZ Act—named after, you guessed it, a certain Governor who allowed fraud to run rampant in his State. The idea behind it is about as simple as it gets: Don't pay first and ask questions later. Kansas families don't do business that way. Small businesses don't do business that way. If you are remodeling your kitchen, you don't hand the contractor every penny before a single cabinet is installed. If you are hiring someone to fix your roof, you don't write the check before the work is finished. You pay after the job is done.

Yet that is exactly the opposite of how Washington has too often operated. For years, the Federal Government has pushed billions of dollars out the door up front with little accountability and then acted surprised when criminals disappeared with the money.

My WALZ Act simply says: Federal payments should be made as reimbursements after—after—the services have actually been provided. That one simple reform closes one of the biggest loopholes that have allowed billions of taxpayer dollars to be stolen before they ever get the chance to disappear.

But this package doesn't stop there. It claws back unused COVID funds, strengthens Treasury's fraud detection systems, extends the statute of limitations so pandemic fraudsters can't simply run out the clock. It protects our veterans from scammers. It combats emerging AI-generated fraud and gives law enforcement stronger tools to hold criminals accountable. Taken together, these reforms represent one of the strongest anti-fraud packages Congress has considered in years.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle spent years responding to every problem the same way: throwing more money at it. We believe the first question should be: Where is the fraud? Where is the waste? Where is the abuse? And how do we stop it before asking taxpayers for another dime?

This administration has created real momentum for the first time in years. We are not just talking about fraud, we are finding it, prosecuting it, and putting criminals on notice that stealing from the American taxpayer has consequences. People are already being held accountable, and more need to be.

Congress should build on that momentum by giving law enforcement and Federal Agencies the tools they need to keep fraudsters out of our programs and behind bars where they belong.

So let's not waste this opportunity. Let's make these reforms permanent. Let's close the loopholes once and for all. Let's protect the taxpayers who fund the government. Let's send a clear message that the era of easy money for fraudsters is over.

I urge every one of our colleagues to support the Protecting American Taxpayers Act.

I yield the floor.

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

HEALTHCARE

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I have been coming up here and talking about, well, a couple of things.

How much does healthcare cost? Right now, people watching from the Gallery, people watching at home, people who happen to be in here—all of us are experiencing a commonality, which is that healthcare is incredibly expensive.

By the way, you may say: No, I have great insurance. It pays for everything.

No, that is coming out of your wages. You are a successful businessman. The people you employ, when you buy them insurance, that comes out of their compensation otherwise, and that is a reality.

The more you pay for health insurance, the less you get paid in your pocketbook because it is coming out of the same bucket.

But if you are one of those who are just having a hard time making it happen, if we look at the things we think of as being expensive—utilities, entertainment for the family, car payments, groceries, college tuition—it just keeps on climbing—a mortgage. More expensive than all for a family of four is healthcare. That is our problem.

So I have been trying to address it with something that I call the MVP agenda. We, under this plan, would give up to $2,000 to a family of four in a prefunded health savings account, and you add that to price transparency. So money in your pocket with value for the patient—the MVP plan.

It seems really ambitious, but let me just put a little bit more of a point on why this is important. The average family is carrying $10,000 in credit card debt. Now, think about that—$10,000. A family is not paying that off every month. It turns out they are paying the minimum balance due. How do we know that? Because the percentage of income going to credit card interest has almost tripled over the last number of years. They are paying the minimal amount and carrying greater and greater debt in order to make ends meet. Well, they are not really making ends meet; they are just trying to get by right now.

So that is what is stressing the importance of having a plan that actually addresses their needs, not some abstract ''Oh, can't we do it in the by and by, and it may make some indirect difference.'' No. You can directly help a family by putting money in the pocket and coupling that with price transparency to bring value to the patient.

Now, I have some good news. We did something today in HELP Committee, the committee which I chair, called the Price Tags Act—Patients Deserve Price Tags.

ROGER MARSHALL and JOHN HICKENLOOPER, Senators from Kansas and Colorado, came together for a bill, which my staff helped to put together, and we passed it out of committee, and it is the Patients Deserve Price Tags, which is price transparency for the goods and services you purchase in the healthcare arena.

Now, let's put a little bit of a point on this. I suspect the Presiding Officer has gone into a restaurant where they don't have the price on the menu. It is like a five-star French restaurant, if there are that many stars, and the waiter doesn't tell you the price. If you ask the price, he looks at you like you shouldn't belong there. If you have to ask the price, you can't afford it.

Usually, if that is the case for my wife and me—in fact, always—we excuse ourselves after having a couple of crackers, and we say: Thank you very much, but we have a crying baby at home. We look a little bit old for a baby. Well, it is a grandchild.

The point being: If they are not telling you the price, probably you can't afford it.

Now, audience, people watching, anybody here, when is the last time you went to a hospital and you said ''Show me the price. Show me the price.'' It just doesn't happen. Do you know there are actually laws out there? But I can tell you, if you ask ''Show me the price,'' you are going to cause confusion.

Now, I am a doctor. I have been in this environment. I always kind of admire—kind of chuckle. I am a gastroenterologist. I used to do colonoscopies. So the patient is there. He has been prepped, which means that his colon has been cleaned out and he has been having diarrhea for about 6 hours. He has a gown on that covers everything but the derriere, a thin sheet above him. And he is given a lot of pieces of paper to sign, and at that point, he has the ability to ask ''How much does this colonoscopy cost?''

Now, that is—you are beyond the point of no return. You are not going to find actionable items, if they are even able to give you the price, at that point. You have already ordered at the French restaurant where they don't show you the price, and they are bringing the food to the table, and by golly, you are going to pay for it no matter how much it is.

But we have passed the Patients Deserve Price Tags Act, and that means that now, the patient is going to be told how much something costs.

If we have a health savings account or if you are just paying cash or in some way you are responsible for the goods and services that you are purchasing, you are going to be told the price.

Why is that? Why is that important? A cardiologist friend told me recently—a couple of years ago, actually—of a cardioversion for atrial fibrillation. If you did it in the doctor's office, it costs you $130; if you did it in the hospital, it costs you $13,000. Now, would it make a difference to someone, if they had a $4,000 deductible, to know that they either pay $130 if they went to the doctor's office or they pay the full deductible and the insurance company pays more but they pay 20 percent of that more if they went to the hospital? I think it would.

So price transparency lowers the cost of being insured and increases wages over time.

By the way, let's get back to our restaurant metaphor. When you go and they don't tell you the price, you kind of have a sense that no matter what you order, you are going to come out substantially poorer. But you are a little bit tight. You go in—you know, maybe when I was a teenager on a date, this was more common—and I can order the surf and turf with the lobster and the filet mignon, and it is going to cost me four times what the spaghetti costs. Now, depending on my budget, I may decide to get the spaghetti. I still have a great meal, still walk away full, nutrition is all satisfied, but because I had the price, I was able to control how much I spent. That is what price transparency does, and the Patients Deserve Price Tags Act begins to give them that price transparency.

Now, by the way, that promotes competition. If you know that if you get your colonoscopy here it is $1,000 and if you get it over there it is $5,000, I can promise you that the place charging $5,000 is going to lower the price.

And the patient with the prefunded health savings account—remember, in the MVP plan—they will have money in their pocket. They have an extra incentive.

I use the example of the woman whose child has an earache. She says: Hey, Siri, which urgent care center near me has the best afterhours price for an appointment for an earache?

Well, here, it is $50; there, it is $250. She is going to go where it is $50, but the one that charges $250 is going to lower their price.

Now, the advantage of this: If you combine the money in the pocket, where they have the prefunded health savings account, with the price transparency, you begin to lower the price of being insured. The patient has the money in their pocket, but now, with the Patients Deserve Price Tags Act, they can spend that money wisely. Instead of that money put into their health savings account being something that people just rebuff, instead, it is something that they can spend wisely.

By the way, they can also begin to purchase a more affordable insurance policy. The Presiding Officer probably, in his businesses, gives a ''You can choose option A or B or C for your insurance.'' If you choose the option with the higher deductible, then the premium is lower. If we have put $2,000 into your health savings account, you can choose that higher deductible because the first $2,000 is covered, and that higher deductible means that you have a lower premium.

The business owner saves money. He can use it to increase wages. But the employee saves money because their share of the premium is likewise less.

So I try to put it this way: If you have the Patients Deserve Price Tags Act and we are able to put money in the pocket and the patients choose the more affordable plan, they pay less. And if you look at the amount of money going to someone's salary—can I see that one. This is the total compensation package that someone gets when they are employed. Now, some of it goes to payroll taxes. That is a fixed portion. That is going out of your income. There is nothing you can do about that.

Your benefits—principally, what you pay for your health insurance—is the next biggest slice. The more healthcare costs, the more bread you spend on benefits. The less your healthcare costs, the more bread goes into your salary.

Now, for those people who grew up in the sixties, ''bread'' was the word they used for ''money.'' So think about this as being something literal: You have more money in your pocket not just because we have put money into your health savings account but because, as you pay less for insurance, you have less money to pay out of your pocket for the insurance, and the more money you get to keep to live the rest of your life.

We have been talking about people's wages not growing. Boom. That is how wages start to grow again. They begin to shrink the amount going for benefits, which increases the amount somebody has for the rest of their life.

Now, let me just go back to the Patients Deserve Price Tags Act. This is the most expansive, aggressive, comprehensive, patient-focused, business owner-focused piece of legislation for price transparency that has ever passed in Congress. If we pursue further healthcare bills—for example, reconciliation—we can move the ''money in your pocket'' portion, but this would stand on its own—a bipartisan piece of legislation that passed almost unanimously out of committee today and which would benefit almost every American who has got employer-sponsored insurance.

It is a huge first step. We will reconcile with the House, which has passed their own version of price transparency. This administration has been very aggressive promoting transparency. I am pleased to say that a significant portion of the MVP agenda passed out of committee; it is going to be headed to the President's desk soon; and, most importantly, individuals will have more money in their pocket and better coverage for their health.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. President, I have been working on Social Security now 8 years. Why? One, it is a guarantee—an intergenerational guarantee—made to Americans, when they get to a certain age, to retire. It is an earned benefit which says that, after a lifetime of work and contribution, Americans can count on a measure of financial security.

Today, more than 75 million Americans rely on Social Security. Most are retired workers. Many are disabled. Others are widows or widowers and children.

Now, let's just set the context: A program that 75 million Americans rely