

NOMINATION OF TODD BLANCHE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, well, make no mistake, Todd Blanche has no intention of stopping Trump's corruption. He has spent his career enabling it.

Instead of seeing Todd Blanche's so-called deal for the sham that it is, Senate Republicans are, once again, taking Trump's personal attorney at his word. All Blanche's deal does is accept the reality that Trump's MAGA slush fund is never getting through the courts. Blanche's so-called deal does nothing—nothing—to stop the IRS sweetheart deal that lets Trump and his family cheat their way out of tens of millions of dollars in taxes.

Let me repeat that. Blanche is still perfectly fine with giving Trump a permission slip to commit tax fraud to the tune of tens of millions of dollars.

Is the Senate GOP willing to go along with Trump's tax fraud? Blanche certainly is.

Senate Republicans keep pretending that Blanche made real concessions on the slush fund. The truth is he just gave up a fight he had already lost in court.

And there is no guardrail preventing Trump and Blanche from using taxpayer dollars to give cash payouts to violent January 6 insurrectionists, MAGA billionaires, and the Trump family.

Trump won't even hide his intention to resurrect his MAGA cash rewards program. Just last night, Trump said: "A lot of people like" the slush fund. Those were his words. He said it. He said it "would be a reimbursement for the pain that" January 6 insurrectionists "suffered."

Where is the reimbursement for the economic pain Trump has inflicted on the American people with his rampant corruption and his disastrous agenda?

No one wants this slush fund, other than Trump and his cronies. There has never been a more clear-cut case of self-dealing in American history. Trump sued himself, settled with himself, and then gave himself tax immunity for life and \$2 billion to either pocket—in his own pocket—from the Federal Treasury or pass out to bad people, all at the taxpayers' expense.

Senate Republicans, if you truly care about ending this corruption, then work with us to ban it by law. Don't put the architect of Trump's grafts in charge of the Department of Justice.

(The remarks of Mr. SCHUMER pertaining to the introduction of S. 5212 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, finally, on the CR, Senate Democrats have been crystal clear: We want to fund the government, avoid a shutdown, and pass strong, bipartisan appropriations bills that deliver for the American people.

The CR released yesterday is a responsible pathway to do just that. The bill allows us to continue negotiating a

budget that won't leave working families behind. I applaud Senator MURRAY for her tireless work and her success in preventing Trump's dangerous effort to politicize Federal grants from taking effect, as we fight to block it altogether.

Throughout these negotiations, Senate Democrats are fighting for the American people. We will continue fighting for a budget that helps Americans get ahead and thwarts Trump's corrupt, costly, and chaotic agenda that is stretching Americans thin.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, when I think about the issue of public health, I remember a time in my childhood when one of my friends didn't show up for school. I asked people: Where did she go?

They shook their heads and said: Polio.

When she finally returned, she couldn't walk without heavy leg braces. I will never forget the agony I saw in her eyes.

Sadly, in my childhood, that story was common. For decades, a kid could go to school healthy and be paralyzed before the end of the day.

But suddenly—suddenly—it all changed. Dr. Jonas Salk created the polio vaccine. Dr. Sabin came up with a form that didn't require a needle. By 1979, polio was eradicated in America. A disease that would strike fear in the hearts of everyone was a distant memory.

I think there is a special place in history reserved for researchers and scientists like Dr. Salk and Dr. Sabin, who devoted their lives to saving others—people like Norman Borlaug, Edward Jenner, Madame Marie Curie, and Albert Calmette.

There is another person whose name could be on that list as well—someone who has saved millions of lives, both in America and around the world, through his lifetime of public service. His name: Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Dr. Fauci worked for the National Institutes of Health for 54 years, 38 of which he served as Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. He has advised seven Presidents, of both parties, and seen our Nation through countless public health crises—from SARS to avian flu, swine flu, Zika, Ebola, and on and on.

Aside from his work against COVID-19, Dr. Fauci may be best known for his work on HIV/AIDS. Dr. Fauci's tireless efforts on HIV/AIDS, both domestically and worldwide, through the creation of PEPFAR—the President's Emergency

Plan for AIDS Relief—is the main reason why this horrible disease is no longer a death sentence. In recognition of his achievement, Dr. Fauci was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2008, our Nation's highest civilian honor, by then-President George W. Bush.

Dr. Fauci is an example of American excellence, a brilliant scientific mind, and yet the Republican Party has chosen to make this doctor who has saved countless lives a political target.

Last week, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs subpoenaed Dr. Fauci, in front of the Congress, for a hearing with the express goal of humiliating and vilifying him. For nearly 3 hours, my Republican colleagues berated, cursed, and insulted a man who has dedicated his life to protecting the health of American families.

This behavior is below the dignity of the Senate. Put simply, it was an embarrassment.

If my colleagues had genuine concern for America's public health, they would turn their attention instead to the destruction wrought by this administration's anti-science agenda.

Listen to this rollcall. Measle cases are at a 35-year high in the United States of America. Whooping cough has resurged. Our response to the hantavirus and cyclospora outbreaks has been abysmal. And hundreds of thousands of people have died due to the administration's vaccine skepticism and public health cuts.

If my Republican colleagues want to hold hearings, perhaps they should hold one on the impact of President Trump's cuts to NIH research funding, which has slowed research into heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's; or they can investigate how the FDA has lost 20 percent of its staff under this administration, deeply damaging food safety efforts. If they were truly concerned for America's health, they would hold hearings on the fact that ACA premiums are doubling for many families across the United States because of the Republicans' Big Beautiful Bill.

These are the real health crises of the day—all entirely of this administration's own making. But my Republican Senate colleagues have chosen to ignore real life-and-death issues to relitigate COVID conspiracy theories—not in an effort to find out what might have gone wrong or how to prepare for the next pandemic, instead, to try and tear down a man who has devoted his entire life to lifting others up.

Dr. Fauci deserves an apology for the way he was treated by my colleagues, and the American people deserve better than the pitiful display we saw in the Senate last Wednesday.

HEALTHCARE

Now, Mr. President, across Illinois, families are opening up their mail and confronting a painful reality: Healthcare has become very difficult to afford.

For millions of Americans who buy their own insurance through the Affordable Care Act, the problem became much worse this year after the Republicans on the other side of the aisle allowed enhanced premium tax credits to expire. These credits helped working families afford coverage, especially people that do not get health insurance through their employer, including small business owners, independent contractors, and farmers.

The average monthly premium for people buying coverage on the ACA Health Insurance Marketplace increased 58 percent this year alone, and many Americans have been forced to switch to plans with higher deductibles just to keep their monthly premium within reach. Others have dropped health insurance altogether. ACA enrollment in my State dropped by 15 percent because premium costs pushed my constituents out.

For farmers, this healthcare affordability crisis is particularly painful. Farming is not a 9-to-5 job with a benefits package. Many farmers are self-employed.

At the same time, President Trump's war in Iran and reckless tariffs—a version of which he reinstated last week, after the Supreme Court struck down his last batch effort—are squeezing American farmers and farmers in Illinois.

The cost of diesel fuel, fertilizer, and equipment have all skyrocketed. Now health insurance is added to the list.

National Public Radio in Illinois recently told the story of Ben and Paula Sue Steffen, lifelong farmers in Nebraska. Last year, they paid \$13,000 annually for health insurance after receiving support from ObamaCare, the ACA's enhanced premium tax credit. This year, after congressional Republicans refused to extend those tax credits, the Steffens can expect to pay \$32,000 annually for coverage, more than double the \$13,000 they paid last year. They moved to one of the cheapest plans available, which still carries a \$7,200 deductible.

It is not just the Steffens in Nebraska. I heard directly from farmers in Illinois, who report the same or similar health insurance price hikes.

Ben is a farmer from McLean County. He is self-employed. He buys health insurance for himself and his family and their daughter. He told me his family is healthy but their health insurance now costs \$1,458 each month. That is nearly \$17,500 annually just in premiums.

Ben told me:

Health care is drowning me.

He went on:

That's crushing me. Something has to change.

Think about it: A farmer working to support his family and feed this country is paying almost \$17,500 a year just to keep his family insured. Yet, instead of lowering these costs, President Trump and congressional Republicans

have spent the past year making the problem much worse. They allowed the ACA's enhanced premium tax credits to expire, despite repeated warnings about what it meant for families. And they slashed \$1 trillion from the program called Medicaid.

That is a program which is critically important. Think about this for a moment: Every other birth in my State of Illinois is paid for by Medicaid. Seventy percent of the men and women who are in nursing homes in my State are covered by Medicaid. And now the Republicans have proposed slashing \$1 trillion from Medicaid in their so-called Big Beautiful Bill despite pleas from rural hospitals and others that these cuts could be devastating.

Rural hospitals are the academic engines of many rural communities—the biggest employer, one of the most important businesses in town. They operate on razor-thin margins and serve the largest share of patients who are uninsured or covered through public programs.

As more people lose coverage, rural hospitals and clinics face even greater pressure to cut services. I have seen it happen in downstate Illinois. Hospitals in some of the larger towns have announced that they are no longer going to provide OB/GYN services, as an example. For a farmer who may already live miles from the nearest hospital, losing that local hospital or local clinic or maternity ward or emergency department can literally be a matter of life or death.

Instead of building grand ballrooms in the White House, outfitting new aircraft as Air Force One, and starting an unnecessary war with Iran, the President should be focused on what matters most to Americans: bringing down the cost of living.

We should immediately restore the enhanced premium tax credits that made coverage affordable and protect Medicaid and the rural hospitals that communities depend on. We should also be working together to lower healthcare costs, not forcing farm families and other families like Ben's to shoulder thousands more in costs each year.

Ben told me:

Something has to change.

He is right. In less than 100 days, he will have his chance to speak as an American about the future and whether we can put up with what we have seen so far.

Senate Democrats will keep fighting to make quality healthcare more affordable and accessible for all, including farmers, rural communities, and working families across Illinois and America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BRITT). The Senator from Washington.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, we have our work cut out for us as we work to fund the government for the coming fiscal year.

As costs for our families go up and up and up, the President wants a \$1½ trillion war budget, and he wants to cut programs working people depend on to pay for it. No. No way. And as his disastrous war with Iran rages on, Trump is even asking for another \$70 billion on top of that to bankroll the war. It is really hard to imagine more backward funding priorities, especially as so many families today are struggling and being hurt by the cuts to healthcare and food aid.

Congress is not an ATM to fund Trump's disastrous wars abroad, so, as I have said many times, we need to rip up the President's budget and write a new one. I have been very clear from the start: We absolutely must prioritize helping families and lowering costs as we do that, and that means rejecting the President's astronomical defense request and instead delivering significantly more funding for our non-defense budget so we can invest in helping people here at home.

It is clear that we will definitely need more time to get this done and reach bipartisan agreement on the funding levels, just as we have done in the Senate for the last 3 years, which then allows us to draft bipartisan bills for fiscal year 2027. So I am very glad we were able to craft a bipartisan CR to keep the government funded and to make sure we can avert a shutdown that no one wants, while giving us time to reach a bipartisan agreement on a top line in our funding bills.

Two weeks ago, House Republicans sent us an incomplete CR with several major issues. It is critical that we address those issues in any CR, and that is exactly what we have done.

Perhaps most important, we closed a loophole in the House Republican CR that would have allowed the Trump administration to transfer funding provided for other programs to Border Patrol. That was a nonstarter. Until Republicans finally agree to enact desperately needed reforms to ICE and Border Patrol, we cannot approve another cent for them.

This new CR that we have written includes some really important extensions and language that House Republicans did not, and that includes extensions of authorizations for important health, veterans, and infrastructure programs and language to make sure that key housing programs and a program to help feed low-income seniors can continue serving Americans.

This bill also rejects requests from President Trump for even more flexibility and funding for the Pentagon, including \$1 billion for Trump-class battleships.

My Democratic colleagues and I pushed very hard and secured an important provision to prevent the Office of Management and Budget from implementing its corrupt new grants rule, which would have required a Trump political appointee to sign off on every last Federal grant and empowered them to terminate any grant at any