

Senator MURPHY told CNN on Sunday that Venezuela, he said, is “not a security threat” to the United States. He sure viewed it differently in the past. Evidently, they were all for it before they were against it. That is what we see with these Democrats: something they are for, President Trump does it, and now they are against it.

The question I have for Democrats is, Do they no longer think that arresting Maduro is a good thing? They supported it in the past—every one of them.

Arresting Maduro was not partisan or political. It was a professionally executed law enforcement action conducted by a superb team of dedicated military professionals, and I congratulate each and every one of them. Every parent in this country should be happy today about this arrest because now their children will be safer from poisoning and death. This arrest will save thousands of American lives—lives that would have been lost due to Maduro’s drug trafficking.

And what are the numbers? Was it 80,000 American lives lost since 2020 as a result of the poison that Maduro has forced into this country? On Saturday, President Trump took bold action, and he took action to protect the citizens of this great country.

We should celebrate the success in Venezuela. We should take great pride in the brave men and women who carried out the successful mission. Republicans are going to continue to stand on the side of safety, security, and America peace through strength.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this month, January 2026, marks a new era for Medicare. After decades of empty promises about lowering the cost of prescription drugs, the prices of the 10 most expensive drugs under Medicare will finally fall.

Starting this year, 2026, seniors who rely on medications to treat blood clots, diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers will see discounts of up to 79 percent for these essential drugs. There are 9 million American seniors who will save a total of \$1.5 billion in annual out-of-pocket costs, including nearly 300,000 seniors in Illinois who take 1 of those 10 drugs.

Why did it take so darned long to lower these prices? Politicians have been talking about it for years. For years, Medicare was blocked from negotiating the price of drugs by the pharmaceutical companies. They didn’t

want to cut into their profits. That changed when Democrats passed the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022 under the Biden administration. This law empowered Medicare to bargain for fair prices for medications used by seniors.

Not one single Republican voted for this bill in 2022. Let me say that again. Democrats overcame the objections of congressional Republicans and Big Pharma, who were complaining about how negotiating drug prices was socialism—socialism. Now seniors will be saving hundreds of dollars a month because Democrats rolled up our sleeves to deliver price cuts on prescription drugs.

What has President Trump done to make healthcare more affordable? Nothing. Instead, he decided to slash Medicaid by \$1 trillion with the passage of the so-called big beautiful budget bill.

Because of this law, many hospitals across Illinois and across the country, especially in rural areas, may not survive. Rural hospitals are the backbone of communities in my State and in many others. They are the anchors of the local economy. Several hospitals that are barely squeaking by today have told me they will fall into the red because of the Republican healthcare cuts in this law. Recently, I surveyed all of the hospitals in Illinois, and 129 responded to my survey. They wrote to me to say they will struggle greatly with these cuts from the big beautiful budget bill of the Trump administration. These hospitals will face longer emergency room wait times. They will be forced to cut services, including behavioral health and maternity care. They will have to lay off doctors and nurses, which is exactly the opposite of what we need in rural America.

My Republican colleagues know exactly how devastating these Medicaid cuts will be. That is why they attempted to remedy the situation by including a \$50 billion rural health transformation grant in their Big Beautiful Bill. Let’s do some math here. They are cutting \$1 trillion out of Medicaid, and they are trying to fill that gap with \$50 billion. I am a liberal arts major, but I think I can do basic math. What they are talking about doing is restoring 5 percent of the \$1 trillion they are cutting from Medicaid—5 percent.

In addition to cutting \$1 trillion from Medicaid, congressional Republicans refused to extend the Affordable Care Act enhanced premium tax credits under Trump’s Big Beautiful Bill. Last year, 22 million Americans relied on these credits to afford their healthcare, but now they have expired. Despite pressure from patients, physicians, and providers, congressional Republicans refused to extend them.

What is the impact of refusing to extend this program that makes health insurance more affordable? I am afraid it is obvious. During the 2026 open enrollment period, millions of people decided to drop their health insurance coverage. Others are being forced to

make impossible choices between food, car payments, and housing costs. If we fail to immediately solve these problems, millions of people will become uninsured in this country, and those who will retain coverage will pay double or triple for their healthcare plans.

It is not too late to do something even though we are hopelessly divided on most of the issues facing us. Let’s hope that health insurance will be the exception. Congress can extend the tax credits and reopen the signup period before the worst impact is felt.

At least some of my Republican colleagues recognize the pain their refusal to negotiate has caused. Last month, four Senate Republicans—four—broke ranks to vote with Democrats to extend the enhanced premium tax credits and help people pay for their health insurance—four Republicans. In the House, four House Republicans signed a discharge petition to force a vote later this week to extend the tax credits. We must be ready to act when the bill arrives in the Senate.

Americans do not have time for Congress to litigate the entirety of the U.S. healthcare system, but we do need to triage now. Let’s do something to help these people keep their health insurance. I have spoken with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and have made it clear we want to help Americans pay for these bills. I want to join them. It should be done on a bipartisan basis, and we should waste no time.

VENEZUELA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is a heady experience to go through a classified briefing at the highest levels of our government, and virtually every U.S. Senator of both political parties had that opportunity this morning. I took advantage of it. It is rare and important. It was an explanation by our leaders in the Cabinet and the administration of what happened in Venezuela just a few days ago when Mr. Maduro was removed from power and brought to the United States to be held accountable for his actions in narcotics terrorism.

This is not a new issue to me. In 2018, I took a trip to Caracas and met with President Maduro, his First Lady, and members of his administration. It was clear to me that Venezuela was in trouble. You could see it on the streets. People were literally starving, and hospitals were going without medicine. It was pretty clear to me that Maduro was ruling not by democratic appeal but by the force of his power in office.

He was facing an election in just a few weeks, and I told him at that time that, if he did not have international observers at his election to verify that it was an honest election, the world would not believe the results. He ignored my advice, which was no surprise. He went ahead with the election and had a disputed result. He claimed victory, which others said didn’t happen, and he did it again a few years

later. So he discredited himself in the eyes of the world community, and his country continued to suffer.

Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Venezuelans abandoned Venezuela, saying it was impossible to live there under his authoritarian rule without the basics of life: food, medicine, and shelter. So this decision to remove him is not one that causes tears in my household. We believe he was unfit for office. He was defeated in the election, and he had to pay a price for it. I am glad that he is not in power today.

During the course of our briefing this morning, our military leaders and others spelled out the details of how he was physically removed from office just a few days ago. He still is going to be held accountable in the courts of law in the United States—that is for sure—but there is also discussion about where we go from here.

If you remove the President of a country, what happens next?

Under their constitution, a woman named Delcy Rodriguez, the Vice President, was sworn in as his successor. I met her during my visit there. She is a hard-liner when it comes to the politics of the region and her brother even more so. We spoke for a period of time, and I became convinced that they would be difficult to deal with, although that is the reality of the moment.

Here is the point I want to make: I understand why our administration was very careful in disclosing information about the removal of Maduro from office. The lives and futures of the men and women in uniform from the United States were on the line, and we should not compromise their safety in any way to achieve our goal; but there comes a point—and that point should be immediately—when this administration decides to trust the American people and tell them the whole story. I believe there are things that can be said which will not compromise the safety of the United States or our friends but that explains to the American people what is at stake here.

What happened in that raid to remove Maduro from office?

Most of the details are an amazing display of military superiority, which the United States enjoys, but there were other questions that were raised, too, during the course of this.

In addition, the question is, Where do we go from here? What is going to happen to Venezuela's future? What is our responsibility? What are we accepting?

The American people need to be in on that conversation. It is easy, I learned in my time in the House and Senate, to get into a war but that it is far more difficult to get out of one. I worry that, many times, we have blundered into a situation which looks so simple in terms of nation building, and it turned out to be so complex. Then the war went on for years and years and years at the expense of not only American taxpayers but, more importantly,

American lives. It is time for the American people to be part of that conversation. Why do I think so? Because the Constitution explicitly says it.

The Constitution says that the power to declare war in the United States resides in this Chamber and in the House of Representatives. Congress has the only authority to declare war. This President, like many others of both parties, has ignored that requirement and, I think, at his own peril. They are engaging us in a long-term conflict which could cost us dearly, and they are not engaging the American people in the discussion and rationale of our ultimate goals in the region.

This briefing this morning was a good one. Senator TIM KAINE of Virginia asked a question, and I think it was the right question: When are we going to trust the American people enough to tell them exactly what happened in Venezuela leading up to the removal of Maduro and what is likely to follow? It is an important, critical question. It will be costly in terms of the future of the United States of America if we are not explicit and honest with the people of this country. Now is the time for that honesty.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

VENEZUELA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I just got back from an all-Senators briefing with senior administration officials about what is going on in Venezuela. Again, another briefing. Again, no answers.

As before, we walked out of the room with far more questions than answers. It is not just the Senators and Congressmen in the SCIF, a classified room, who deserve answers, it is the American people who deserve answers.

The American people want to know: How much is this going to cost us at a time when we are seeing our costs rise for things like housing and groceries and healthcare? They want to know what kind of troops—how many troops are going to be needed there?

It is clear that the leadership's succession plan that the administration envisions now that Maduro—the awful person that he is—is gone, the people who are replacing him are just as untrustworthy, just as corrupt, just as bad as he is.

How is Trump going to run the country with these people as his underlings?

So the public deserves answers at this crucial moment because the American people are asking: What the hell is going on in Venezuela? And why is this President, who campaigned on "America First," now spending all his time and energy on escapades overseas?

What is going to happen next? The public is totally in the dark.

We need to know how long an involvement in Venezuela is going to last. Trump has said it is going to take some time. What does that mean? Iraq was more than a decade.

How many troops are we talking about?

How much money and what guardrails are in place?

The American people want to know, is there a place where you say no more? Nobody knows. On something as risky and as different as this—differently bad as this—people need real answers. That is how our system is set up, but this administration is totally—totally—opaque and, frankly, dishonest with the American people when it comes to Venezuela.

We discussed so many things in the room. And in the room, there was a bipartisan sense of concern with America simply plunging into other countries. I did not get adequate answers.

Are we planning on going into Greenland? Are we planning on going into Colombia? Mexico?

The answers were very unsatisfying.

So this escapade is fraught with huge peril that history teaches us we should avoid. There is chaos in the streets of Caracas right now. Organized gangs are patrolling the streets, oppressing the rights of citizens. At any moment, the interim government's grip on power could deteriorate. The Vice President—former Vice President under Maduro, who is now the President—is totally unreliable, is corrupt, and hates America. That is whom we are relying on. What kind of plan is this?

Again, it is not enough for Senators to walk into a classified briefing and hear the administration's sales pitch. The public has to hear it. I am certain that the public, once they hear it, is going to be as angry, as skeptical, as unconvinced as we are.

The American people need answers and facts presented in public.

My Republican colleagues: Don't you have an obligation to hold hearings—public hearings—and bring Hegseth and Rubio before you and ask these tough questions, not in the closed quarters of a SCIF, where no one is allowed to repeat what they say, but in public?

Where are our chairs of the relevant committees? Not to hold a hearing on something as momentous and potentially destructive as this—where are our Republican colleagues?

We need administration officials to come testify and to answer the tough questions in public. That is what this Republic is all about. That is why we have three branches of government. That is why the Founding Fathers said the war power, as important a decision as going to war is, should be in the hands of the Congress, a public institution, not in the hands of just an Executive.

And yet, right now, it is in the hands of an Executive because our Republican colleagues are supine. They just aren't demanding hearings, aren't demanding that the President come clean in terms of talking to the American people.