and a long-term vision for sustainable health care reform.

I want to take just a few minutes today to talk about the approach we want to take with the Patient CARE Act and why it is a better approach than the one being taken under ObamaCare. Our plan rests on four simple principles. First, repeal ObamaCare with all its costly mandates, taxes, and regulations. Second, reduce costs by taking the government out of the equation and instead empowering consumers to make choices about their own health care. Third, provide common sense consumer protections, including protections for individuals with preexisting conditions. And fourth, reform our broken Medicaid system by giving States more flexibility to provide the best coverage for their citizens.

Let me talk about each of these principles in a little more detail. For any health care proposal to have a chance of success, it must get rid of ObamaCare. The failures of ObamaCare have been well documented here on the Senate floor and elsewhere. The American people deal with those failures on a daily basis. That is why the first principle of our proposal is to repeal ObamaCare once and for all. Then we move on to address the biggest barrier to health care in this country—skyrocketing costs.

Our plan would give taxpayers affordable options to meet their health care needs by harnessing the power of the marketplace—not through Federal Government mandates. With more options in the private insurance marketplace, people will be better able to find insurance that meets their needs. The lack of choice and draconian coverage mandates is one of ObamaCare's largest shortcomings. Our proposal would allow consumers to find affordable plans that address their particular needs without making them pay for coverage they will never use or want.

Our proposal would also give States more options to provide people with more coverage. Under our plan families earning up to 300 percent of the Federal poverty level would be eligible for a tax credit to purchase insurance of their choosing. In addition, our plan would help small businesses enjoy the same advantages in the marketplace as large businesses by allowing them to band together to leverage their purchasing power to buy insurance for their employees.

The Patient CARE Act also proposes an expansion of the health savings accounts so that people can plan and save for their future medical needs. Under our plan, for the first time consumers would be able to use their pretax dollars to pay premiums and deductibles. Our proposal would inject more transparency into health care costs so people can know what their providers are charging and how successful they are.

In addition, we include other cost-saving measures such as medical malpractice liability reform to help reduce the expensive practice of unnecessary defensive medicine.

Our plan would reduce the distortions in the Tax Code that actually increase the cost of health care in our country by capping the unlimited employee exclusion. This is a key way of restraining costs that has support across the political and economic spectrum.

In our proposal the exclusion is capped at a generous $30,000 for a family plan, and that threshold will continue to grow at CPI plus one. Most importantly, we make sure we preserve the employer-sponsored health care system for those 160 million Americans who rely on it by leaving the employer deduction untouched and by repealing the job-killing employer mandate. By increasing consumer choice and utilizing the power of the market, our proposal will actually reduce health care costs, something ObamaCare has miserably failed to do.

Our plan also includes a number of commonsense consumer protections. For example, we would make sure a person would not see their coverage get canceled if they get sick. Our plan would also ensure that people with preexisting conditions could not be denied access to health insurance. Period.

I will repeat that for my friends on the other side, who were confused about this in some of their speeches: No American with a preexisting condition can be denied coverage under our plan. End of story.

We would also let children stay on their parents' plans through age 26 and prevent insurers from putting caps on total benefits paid out over a person's lifetime so that no patient will have to worry about maxing out their coverage.

Finally, our plan would address the current failings of the Medicaid Program. Keep in mind, many of the newly insured people credited to ObamaCare have obtained their coverage through the expansion of Medicaid. Of course, this is absurd as Medicaid is a financially unsound program that continues to swallow up State budgets on a yearly basis. ObamaCare did not improve the stability of Medicaid, it only threatened it further.

The Patient CARE Act includes a key reform that is similar to the Medicaid modernization plan that Chairman UPTON and I proposed in the last Congress.

Currently, Federal taxpayers have an open-ended liability to match State Medicaid spending, which is a significant driver in Medicaid's budgetary challenges. Our proposal would create per capita spending caps—something President Clinton, and many Democrats who remain in this Chamber, supported in the past.

We would couple this structural reform to Medicaid with new flexibility for States to manage their Medicaid populations. On top of that, we would give those on Medicaid the option of purchasing private health insurance, which is more frequently accepted by quality doctors.

I hope you are grasping a pattern when it comes to this proposal. At virtually every step, our aim with this proposal is to take the Federal Government out of the equation and put individuals and families in charge of making their own health care decisions. We trust the American people to make the best choices for themselves.

The Patient CARE Act represents a sustainable and achievable alternative to ObamaCare, one that will succeed without the tax hikes, the mandates, and the outrageous government spending that came part and parcel with the Affordable Care Act. Most importantly, it will actually reduce the cost of health care in this country.

Once again, our hope with unveiling the latest version of this framework is that we can continue the conversation about improving health care for individuals and families. I have given just a top-line, 35,000-foot overview of the proposal here today. I want to invite my colleagues to take a look at our ideas and give us your feedback. I hope health care experts around the country will continue to do the same.

Unlike ObamaCare, this is a product that will rely on consensus and feedback. We have more work to do. It is important, and I look forward to more discussions and conversations about these issues.

REGULAR ORDER IN THE SENATE

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I also rise today to speak about the recent progress we have made in restoring the Senate as an institution.

After being sworn in as President pro tempore just over a month ago, I rose to address the state of the Senate and how we, as Members, must work together to restore its greatness. This is an opportune moment to take stock and to reflect briefly on our progress toward achieving this goal.

I am pleased to report that we have embarked on a new chapter of thoughtful, productive legislating in this Chamber, just as the Framers intended us to and just as the American people expect us to.

We have had hours upon hours of open, constructive debate with arguments from both sides of the aisle. We have considered dozens of amendments reflecting a full range of political viewpoints. The majority leader promised this body that he would restore regular order, and that is precisely what he has done. Not only have we engaged in fulsome debate and considered dozens of amendments, but we have also already passed four major bipartisan bills in a single month to reform and extend the Terrorism Risk Insurance Program, to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline, to address the critically important issue of veteran suicides, and—my bill yesterday—to provide effective restitution for victims of child pornography.

That is what voters elected us to do—to craft good legislation, to debate it,

to improve it through the open amendment process, and then send it to the President's desk.

In my remarks when I was sworn in as President pro tempore, I noted that in recent years the foundations of the Senate's unique character—meaningful debate and an open amendment process—have come under sustained assault by those who have prioritized scoring political points over preserving the Senate's essential role in our system of government.

What a difference such a short time can make. What a breath of fresh air these last 6 weeks have been for this body on both sides of the aisle. We are moving forward. We are keeping our promises, and we are helping to restore the Senate as the world's greatest deliberative body.

I wish to highlight some specifics of these positive changes we have witnessed over the past work period.

First, robust debate. The late Senator Robert C. Byrd liked to say that ''as long as the Senate retains the power to amend and the power of unlimited debate, the liberties of the people will remain secure.'' In this new Congress, we are restoring the right to meaningful debate.

As I noted last month, when a full and robust debate has occurred, invoking cloture—a motion to end debate—is often appropriate. But we must not abuse this power by always seeking reflexively to cut off debate before it even begins. In the dark days of the previous Congress, we often saw such motions to cut off debate filed as soon as debate had begun, eviscerating any meaningful opportunity for considering the issues.

The Senate desperately needed to return to a system where all Senators have a say in what the Senate does and are able to express their views without getting cut off at the pass. We are now returning to that system. We have resisted the temptation to cut off debate immediately.

Under the majority leader's leadership, this body spent the better part of 3 weeks considering the Keystone XL Pipeline bill. During that time, Senators—both Republican and Democrat—enjoyed ample opportunity to voice their position on the bill as well as on our energy policy more broadly. This represents the exact sort of deliberate character the Senate was designed to embody.

Indeed, the Democratic minority actually used more hours of floor debate on Keystone than did the Republican majority. To me, this is a remarkable statistic indicative of our new majority's commitment to treat the minority fairly and to approach individual Senators, regardless of party, as valuable contributors to our work rather than as mindless partisans.

The Senate was also designed to be the institution in our system of republican self-government that produced wise legislation. Popular passions, parochial interests, and factionalism—what Edmund Randolph called the ''turbulence and follies of democracy''—were to be defined in the Senate where smaller membership and larger constituencies and longer terms would improve the legislative product.

These structural features of the Senate led to the development of a tradition in which individual Members were allowed to offer amendments freely—one of the primary mechanisms by which this body can refine legislation for the better. For centuries, this notion of an open amendment process has been at the core of the Senate's identity. But in recent years, many of us have bemoaned the demise of this tradition. In effect, one of this institution's most defining characteristics was emasculated for partisan political purposes. But the way we dealt with amendments over the course of the last month shows that the open amendment process is making a comeback.

The majority leader shepherded through votes on more than 30 amendments in January, more than double the amendment votes permitted by the Democrats in all of 2014. In fact, in 1 week alone, we voted on more amendments than the previous majority allowed us to vote on all of last year. There could be no clearer evidence of this body's resurgence.

The facts speak for themselves. While one former Democratic Senator did not receive a vote on any of his amendments during the entire extent of his service in this body over the prior 6 years, the lone freshman Democrat Senator in this Congress, the junior Senator from Michigan, has already received a vote on one of his amendments in just the first few weeks of his service here. Truly, under this new majority, Senators of both parties are individually contributing to our work for the common good.

A key part of returning to regular order is restoring the committee process. A healthy committee process is essential to a well-functioning Senate. In committees, Members are often best able to work together to debate, draft, and amend legislation that ultimately passes the Senate. We began resuscitating the committee process in our consideration of the Keystone XL Pipeline bill.

I commend the tireless efforts of the distinguished Chair and ranking member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, who together masterfully led this body through recently unfamiliar territory of legislating through regular order.

The Senator from Alaska merits particular praise for the skill she demonstrated in guiding this bill through the process, while the Senator from Washington should be lauded for her commitment to a fair and orderly process despite her opposition to the underlying policy. Their admirable work set an important example for the rest of us as we return to regular order in the 114th Congress by working together to improve legislation rather than simply trying to shut each other out of the process.

I heard voices from some corners quibbling over certain elements of the Keystone debate process, but to focus on these criticisms misses the forest for the trees by fixating on one or two nitpicks and ignoring how deliberative and inclusive the process really was. We enjoyed open debate, ample opportunity to amend, and respect for committee expertise. This all contributed to the passage of a bipartisan bill.

The proof is in the votes. Of the almost 50 votes on Keystone-related matters, few followed strict party lines, and the final bill won passage with 62 affirmative votes, including those of 9 Democrats. Twenty percent of Democrats present, nearly one-fifth of the caucus, voted for the Keystone bill. This was real bipartisanship.

The result was a critically important piece of legislation that the President of the United States should sign into law. I urge him to do so. But that is not what we are hearing from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. No, the President has said he will veto the bill. In fact, he said he would veto it before we even took it up—before any amendments had even been offered.

Instead, President Obama appears determined to ignore the will of the U.S. Congress, dismissing bills out of hand that have yet to reach his desk. I fail to see how this recalcitrance advances the cause of responsible governance or responds to the will of the American people who made their preferences clearly known at the ballot box last November.

I, for one, will not let the President's irresponsible attitude toward this institution diminish my commitment to it. In fact, I call on each Senator to continue working to restore our Chamber's proper functioning. I urge all of us to participate actively in the committee process, help produce sound legislation, and carry out our institutional duties.

The American people can then see for themselves the stark difference between a Senate that works and a White House that is unwilling to engage in genuine negotiation and compromise.

I will close with a note on civility, that crucial ingredient we must never overlook, even in the heat of political discourse. I recall the words of Senator Chris Dodd, my friend, who represented Connecticut in this body for 30 years. In his final speech here on the Senate floor in late 2010, he reminded us that the Senate was intended to be a place where every Member's voice could be heard and where deliberation and even dissent would be valued and respected. As Senator Dodd explained, ''Our Founders were concerned not only with what was legislated, but—just as importantly—with how we legislated.''

I have observed that debate on this floor during the past few weeks—although tense at times—has on the whole been genuine, balanced, and respectful. We must remain true to this

ethos as we continue to reinvigorate the debate and amendment process.

In the weeks and months ahead, new disagreements will surely arise. This is when civility and statesmanship are most needed. We must each overcome whatever instincts may drive us away from civil discourse and toward anger, bitterness, petulance, or self-promotion.

When this new Congress convened just over six weeks ago, I spoke of our collective duty to restore the Senate. I expressed my confidence that we could make the Senate work again by returning to regular order, promoting robust debate, and enabling an inclusive amendment process. We have made admirable progress over the last month. Our actions are backing up our rhetoric. Let us sustain this momentum.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

PRESIDENT'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, this afternoon the Senate voted to approve Dr. Carter's nomination as the next Secretary of Defense. I supported his nomination and appreciated the candor he displayed during both his confirmation hearing and in our private meeting.

I believe the many challenges facing our Nation require a fresh perspective and a strong analytical mind. I am confident Dr. Carter possesses both. Despite the fact the international landscape has changed dramatically over the past few years, the Obama administration has failed to modify its policies to meet the new challenges facing our Nation. In fact, top administration officials have emphasized in recent interviews their approach is not changing and instead offer Americans a laundry list of things they will continue to do. This is unacceptable.

I am very concerned this administration actually believes the correct course of action is to continue what we have been doing. In the Senate, the Armed Services Committee has held a number of hearings to examine the effectiveness of the current U.S. national security strategy.

Witnesses from across the political spectrum have merged on one point. In several key areas, U.S. national security strategy and our regional goals are either ambiguous or divorced from events on the ground. What is needed is a reevaluation, not a continuation.

In Syria, for example, President Obama called on Bashar al-Assad to step down 3 years ago. However, the President has failed to lay out a strategy to accomplish his stated goal. After hundreds of thousands of Syrians have died, terrorist groups have seized control of about half of that country. Further, thanks to assistance provided by Iran and Russia, Assad has fortified his control over much of western Syria.

In response to all of this, President Obama has continued to call for a negotiated transfer of power without any articulation of how this would be accomplished. The President's goal was probably unlikely when it was first conceived, but now it is thoroughly unimaginable.

The Obama administration has also stated the United States intends to degrade and destroy ISIL. While I support this goal, I am concerned we have yet again failed to lay out a strategy to accomplish it.

Yesterday President Obama sent to Congress his authorization of military force. The decision to send young men and women to war is the most serious decision that elected officials will make. This deserves a serious, open, transparent debate that is worthy of the American people. I look forward to a robust committee process on this issue.

I am also eager to hear more from the President about the exact contours of his strategy, particularly when it comes to achieving very clear goals. What exactly do we hope to achieve? Simply stating our objective is to destroy ISIL doesn't reflect the complexities of actually realizing this goal.

The President has waged a campaign of airstrikes against this barbaric terrorist group, but we know airpower alone will not be sufficient to destroy ISIL. While the White House has proposed arming and training Syrian opposition fighters, this effort will take years to produce a force that is strong enough to dislodge ISIL from its strongholds in eastern Syria. What is more, it is unclear how the Syrian fighters—any of whom view Assad as the primary target—will be convinced to first fight ISIL. Questions about the extent to which the United States will provide opposition forces direct air support if they are attacked by ISIL or Assad—those questions remain unanswered. For these reasons, the President has been rightly criticized for not having a clear and effective strategy.

Again, I support the goal of destroying ISIL. But this is a multilayered problem. In Iraq, the administration seems to embrace a growing Iranian role, even though this puts our goal of maintaining a unified Iraq in even greater jeopardy.

With respect to Iran itself, the administration unequivocally states it will not allow that nation to develop a nuclear capability, but we hear reports repeatedly that are suggesting the U.S. negotiators are crafting an agreement that would accept its enrichment program and leave Iran as a threshold nuclear power 1 year away from a bomb, at most.

In Ukraine, the United States imposed sanctions on Russia in March for its intervention. Since that time, Russia has continued to pour heavy weapons and fighters into that conflict. Clearly our policy is not working. We must acknowledge that as Putin continues to build momentum on the battlefield, the incentive for him to honor his diplomatic commitments and end the conflict diminishes.

Additional measures—including defensive weapons for the Ukrainians—are necessary, and they must be implemented. The international community and most Americans are understandably confused by the stark contrast between what they see and what they hear from the White House. They hear vague assertions, but they see no strategy. They hear a goal, but they see no discussion on how to achieve it. This damages our global credibility.

In a world where we rely heavily on partner nations to be our boots on the ground, we cannot afford to have our international allies wondering if we mean what we say.

Dr. Carter will have a lot on his plate in his new role. I hope his appointment will help encourage the strategic reevaluation that is so desperately needed.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOOKER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

(The remarks of Mr. BOOKER pertaining to the introduction of S. 502 are printed in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Mr. BOOKER. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I stand before this body this afternoon to encourage my colleagues—particularly my colleagues on the other side of the aisle—to take into account the need to fund the Department of Homeland Security.

The House of Representatives acted responsibly in passing legislation to keep the Department of Homeland Security funded, and they did so acting more than 1 month in advance of the scheduled expiration of the existing funding stream for the Department of Homeland Security. This was a good move. It was likewise a good move of