

in the marketplace. The State's insurance department cites ObamaCare as the reason behind this troubling news, saying:

Before the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Ohio had a very competitive health insurance market. [But] new regulations from [the] ACA have driven some companies out of Ohio and made it harder for them to do business, both of which have driven up the cost of health insurance in Ohio.

Forcing insurance options out of the marketplace, making it harder for people to find coverage, driving up costs of health insurance—these are the results of ObamaCare in Ohio and across the country, and the pain is all too real for thousands of Americans like those the President visited with just yesterday.

As he addressed a crowd in Cincinnati, the President shared the story of a small business owner from Louisville—my hometown—who, as the President said, is just one of the “many victims of the ObamaCare catastrophe” forced on the American people. Before ObamaCare, this Kentuckian's employees had access to multiple options for high-quality, affordable healthcare. Now, under the failed healthcare law, these workers face premiums that are 150 percent higher, while having fewer choices. To make matters worse, health insurance under ObamaCare has become so unaffordable that he now has difficulty creating new jobs that would employ even more Kentuckians.

This Louisville man is not alone either. Just a couple of days ago, Dr. Tom Price, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, met with small business owners who have faced similar challenges because of ObamaCare, people like one Kentuckian from Richmond. Here is what this Kentuckian and founder of a CPA firm said of her experience with the failed healthcare law:

Of all the clients that we see, there's not one good story about ObamaCare. And it's mostly without exception, horror stories of what has happened to themselves and their own employees.

She, like so many others, knows that the so-called Affordable Care Act has really been anything but affordable for too many small business owners and their employees.

These Kentuckians' stories provide just a glimpse into the disastrous impacts ObamaCare has had on Americans across the country. Although some may try to paint a different picture now, ObamaCare is responsible for the failures and the hurt it has created—not the American people, not those of us trying to help rescue families from this ill-advised law.

Since ObamaCare was fully enacted in 2013, premiums have increased by an average of 105 percent and millions of Americans have lost their plans. This year, people in just under three-quarters of counties nationally have only one or two choices on the ObamaCare exchanges, and the situation is likely to only get worse next year. That is

why Senate Republicans believe we must act. That is why we are working to keep our commitment to the American people and finally provide relief from ObamaCare. This law has failed the American people, and the status quo is clearly unsustainable.

As Senate Republicans continue our conversations on a path forward, I hope our Democratic colleagues will finally put aside their last-ditch efforts to salvage this failing law that is hurting so many people in the States they represent. It is time to face reality, no matter how inconvenient it may be, and help those who are counting on relief from ObamaCare.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

TESTIMONY OF JAMES COMEY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this morning the Intelligence Committee is hearing testimony from former FBI Director James Comey. I hope and expect him to be as forthright and straightforward as he can. The Senate and, by extension, the American people deserve to know the truth about Mr. Comey's interactions with the President.

Based on the opening statement Mr. Comey submitted to the committee, we know that he will confirm much of what we have already learned about the events of the past few months through the press. That is important in and of itself. Until now, we have read these reports with a healthy dose of skepticism, waiting for Mr. Comey to confirm or to refute their veracity. It appears the bulk of what we learned from the reports about Mr. Comey's memos is true.

The President asked Mr. Comey to pledge “loyalty” to the President and asked him if he could “let go” of an investigation into one of the President's close associates, former National Security Advisor General Flynn. That conversation took place in a meeting during which the President raised the prospect of Mr. Comey not continuing in the job.

The Senate appreciates this testimony. I am sure members of the Intelligence Committee will seek answers to many of the remaining and new questions the testimony raises.

There are so many questions that Mr. Comey's testimony leaves hanging out there. Every single lead should be pur-

sued. Let's not lose sight of the very heart of this matter: a foreign adversary interfering with our democracy. There is an open counterintelligence investigation into whether members of the Trump campaign worked with that foreign adversary to help that campaign win the White House. This issue gets to the very foundation of our democracy: free and fair elections and the rule of law.

There is no process more sacred in democracy than the people exercising their voice at the ballot box. There is no principle more enshrined in our legal system than the principle that no one—no one—is above the law. Members of both parties should deeply care about getting the truth, whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I hope that spirit will direct Senators in their questioning today.

RUSSIA AND IRAN SANCTIONS LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, Senators from both parties are negotiating the content of an amendment to the bill for tough, bipartisan Russia sanctions legislation.

On the Democratic side, we feel very strongly that we need a tough, effective package of Russia sanctions to move alongside Iran sanctions. I believe many of my Republican colleagues do, as well, so there is very likely an agreement to be reached.

President Putin has violated the sovereignty of Ukraine by annexing Crimea. He has committed human rights abuses, including the propping up of the brutal Assad regime in Syria, of stifling political dissent and the rights of his own people, and our intelligence community has concluded that Russia made a direct assault on our democracy by conducting a campaign to interfere in our elections.

That is why, principally, I proposed a vote on a bill put forward by my friend, the Republican Senator from South Carolina, Senator GRAHAM. This is a bill that includes as its cosponsors Senators MCCAIN and RUBIO on the Republican side and Senators CARDIN, BROWN, and MCCASKILL on the Democratic side. It is a strong bipartisan bill.

The bill would establish a process for Congress to review any Russia-related sanctions relief. The President and administration officials have demonstrated they are willing to consider lifting sanctions on Russia in exchange for vague, yet-to-be-articulated concessions, if any concessions at all. Congress ought to have the power to review any decision made by this administration before sanctions on Russia are lifted.

Senator MCCAIN has also introduced an amendment, along with Senator CARDIN, which would impose new sanctions on Russia. Given the revelations of Russian interference in our elections, new sanctions are warranted in addition to the existing sanctions. In addition to the Graham-Cardin bill,

which should definitely be included, I hope Senator McCain's proposal is part of our consideration of Russia-related sanctions as well.

Chairman CORKER, Chairman CRAPO, Ranking Member BROWN, and Ranking Member CARDIN are in ongoing discussions, as are the majority leader and I, about the content of the Russia sanctions and amendment. I am hopeful that we can resolve this issue and vote to advance both measures.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, my friends on the other side of the aisle continue to work on their healthcare bill behind closed doors. They haven't made public a shred of bill text or even considered holding a committee hearing to debate the topic. Yesterday my friend the majority leader filed a motion to bring TrumpCare directly to the floor, skipping the committee process.

This is a party that screamed from the rafters "Read the bill, read the bill" when Democrats were putting together the Affordable Care Act. We spent over a year debating that bill. We tried with a bipartisan group of six to come up with a solution.

Republicans are putting together their bill in secret, with no Democratic input, and then will rush their bill to the floor without a single committee hearing, all in the span of 3 short weeks. This is a bill that will alter one-sixth of the American economy and affect tens of millions of American lives. For many, it will have life-and-death consequences.

The way Republicans are crafting this legislation is pulling the wool over the eyes of the American people on one of the most crucial issues affecting their lives. Why? There is only one explanation: They don't want the American people to see their bill. They don't want to go home to townhall meetings and let people give their opinions. Keep it under wraps, rush it through? There is only one good reason: They are not very proud of the product that they have put together.

The Republicans know that even if they make some changes to the bill that came over from the House—they may increase subsidies a bit or lower the amount of tax breaks they give to millionaires—they will still wind up with a bill that is far worse than the status quo: higher costs, less care. That is because they are working from a fundamentally flawed premise, which is to take support away from healthcare programs like Medicaid to give a tax break to the wealthiest Americans. Senate Republicans can nibble around the edges, but they will not be able to excise the rotten core of their healthcare plan.

The House bill has the support of approximately 18 percent of Americans. A majority of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans don't like it. Don't you get the message, my Republican

friends? We understand the ideologues are telling you that you must repeal. But now that people have actually looked at repeal, they realize that is not the way to go.

The right approach is not to move backward, not to undo all the progress we have made in healthcare over the past 8 years and start from scratch. The American people don't want to go back to the days when an insurance company could discriminate against you because you have a preexisting condition or jack up your rates simply because you are older. That is not the kind of healthcare system the American people want. But that seems to be what our Republican colleagues, in the dark of night, are considering.

The right approach is to keep all the good things in the existing law and work in a bipartisan way to make more progress on lowering costs for consumers and improving the quality of care.

Again, I urge my Republican colleagues to drop their repeal efforts and, instead, work with Democrats on actually improving our healthcare system.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I heard President Trump talk about Democrats being obstructionists yesterday—out in Ohio, Kentucky—about a healthcare bill in which they are not asking for Democratic help or input. They are tied in a knot because their own party can't agree on the tax bill. They again are not asking for Democratic input. They are tied in a knot because their own party can't agree.

Now it looks as if they are doing the same thing on infrastructure. The President is in an "alter reality" world. He blames Democrats, but then his Republican colleagues, often at his instruction, are told not to work on the bill with Democrats. What is going on here?

What the President tweets and talks about at his rallies and what is actually happening are two different worlds—two different worlds. That is no good. It is no good for America, no good for the American people, and, frankly, no good for the President.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

COUNTERING IRAN'S DESTABILIZING ACTIVITIES ACT OF 2017—MOTION TO PROCEED

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the

Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 722, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 110, S. 722, a bill to impose sanctions with respect to Iran in relation to Iran's ballistic missile program, support for acts of international terrorism, and violations of human rights, and for other purposes.

Mrs. FISCHER. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, at 1:30 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to executive session for the consideration of Calendar No. 99, the nomination of Scott Brown to be Ambassador to New Zealand; I further ask that there be 15 minutes of debate on the nomination equally divided in the usual form; that following the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on confirmation with no intervening action or debate; and that, if confirmed, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROUNDS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I think we all know that former FBI Director Comey just completed his public testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee. He testified about how President Trump asked him to pledge his loyalty to him personally and how the President asked the FBI to drop the investigation into former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn.

We know that last December, Michael Flynn had a discussion with the Russian Ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Kislyak, about dropping some of the economic sanctions that the United States has imposed on Russia. We know that Michael Flynn subsequently lied about that conversation.

We also know—and former FBI Director Comey discussed it today—that he was fired by President Trump after he refused to pledge his loyalty to the