

ObamaCare for too many. It has been failing the American people for years, and it will collapse around them if we fail to act.

We will not make things better if we go backward with even more Federal control. We will not solve this problem by simply throwing more money at it. Band-aids just will not work here. The American people deserve solutions that finally empower them in making more of their own decisions about their families' healthcare.

I regret that our Democratic colleagues have made clear they are not interested in working seriously with us to pursue the types of comprehensive reforms needed to improve healthcare for hard-working Americans who have been hurt by this law, but the Senate Republican conference will continue working to help these families because we believe they deserve better than ObamaCare and its years of failures.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as Senators continue to return from the State work period, we return here in the Senate to the topic of healthcare, which everyone in America should continue to focus on.

Even after weeks of work, it seems my friends on the other side are no closer to having enough votes to proceed to their bill—which, of course, they insisted on doing with no Democratic votes or input.

The biggest challenge proposed to the legislation during the break was an amendment offered by the junior Senator from Texas, TED CRUZ, which would remove crucial protections for sicker Americans and unbalance the marketplace. The Cruz amendment is a hoax. Under the guise of lowering premiums, the Cruz amendment would actually make healthcare more expensive because deductibles and copayments would be so onerous that many Americans would pay more, not less, in out-of-pocket expenses than they pay today. These lower premium policies will have such high deductibles and copays that the policies themselves would be virtually worthless. Imagine you have a \$2,000 premium and a \$1,000 deductible in your policy. Imagine now that, under the Cruz amendment, an insurance company is allowed to offer a cheaper policy because they aren't re-

quired to cover very many services. That policy might have a premium of \$1,000 but a deductible of \$10,000. You would be paying less monthly, but you would have to put down a huge amount of money for your policy to even kick in. In that way, a Cruz insurance policy is worse than no policy at all because the vast majority would pay a monthly premium and never hit their deductible, so they would be getting no health insurance benefit at all. You would pay the premium, but the deductible is so high, your insurance never kicks in. What good is that? In effect, for many, it is a policy that would have a premium but no insurance.

In addition, Americans with pre-existing conditions will almost certainly be left without access to affordable and quality healthcare, making the Senate bill even meaner than the House bill on this issue. Even the Republican Senator from Iowa, Senator GRASSLEY, said that about the Cruz amendment. Here is what he said:

There's a real feeling that [it's] subterfuge to get around pre-existing conditions. . . . If it has the effect of annihilating the pre-existing condition requirement that we have in the existing bill, then obviously I would object to that.

Those are the words of Senator GRASSLEY.

Members of both parties agree that the most significant potential change to the Republican TrumpCare bill is an amendment that would make the legislation even worse. So make no mistake about it—the Cruz amendment is a cruel, mean hoax.

Let's not forget that even without the Cruz amendment, the substance of the base Senate Republican bill is devastating. The CBO reports it would cause costs to go up, care to go down, and force 22 million Americans off their health insurance. It would end Medicaid as we know it.

This weekend, I had the good experience once again to go to the Utica Boilermaker, a famous 15K road race in my dad's hometown, the largest in the country. People from 45 States participated.

As usual, I walked through the crowd afterwards, congratulating people on a great race. They were sweaty, but they were happy. I came upon three men in wheelchairs. Here they are. Just after they crossed the finish line, the first thing they said to me was this: "Senator, please protect Medicaid; we'd be lost without it."

These were proud men, and they deserved to be proud for finishing a difficult race made harder by their disability. They could be forgiven for taking a moment to celebrate. Instead, they wheeled up to me to talk about how important Medicaid was to them.

These are not slackers. They wouldn't be in a race like this if they were. They needed some help. They are disabled. I don't know how their disabilities came about—probably from work. They look like really strong guys. Are we going to take away their

Medicaid so we can give tax breaks to the wealthiest people in America? I hope not.

These folks know that Medicaid is a lifesaver for Americans with disabilities. They want it maintained and strengthened, not dismantled so our Republican friends can give another tax break to the very wealthy.

These three should remind everyone that dismantling Medicaid is the wrong way to go. It is time to move on from the failing Republicans-only approach and start over in a bipartisan way in healthcare.

Republican leadership has been trying to cajole their Members into voting for this bill by saying that if Republicans fail to pass this bill, they will have to work with Democrats. Republican leadership is not telling their Members: Vote for this bill because it is a good bill. No, they are saying: Vote for this bill or you will have to work with Democrats.

When you can't defend the substance of the bill at all, it is time to move on. When using bipartisanship as a threat is your only argument, it is time to move on.

My Republican friends should not be so afraid of working with Democrats that they are bullied into supporting a terrible bill. The Senate—we all know this—was intended as a forge for bipartisan consensus—a cooling saucer, as the Founding Fathers said. In the Senate, bipartisanship should be the first option, not the last resort.

I repeat: We Democrats are willing to work. We are ready to work with our Republican colleagues on healthcare. Today Democratic leadership sent a letter to my friend the majority leader again offering to work with him on specific legislation to stabilize the marketplaces and improve the quality and lower the cost of care.

The majority leader said over the break that he may be forced to work with Democrats to stabilize marketplaces. Democrats say: Let's do it. Let's do it now.

We sent the majority leader four specific proposals, led by Senator SHAHEEN's amendment to guarantee cost-sharing reduction payments—the most important thing we can do to stabilize the marketplace and even lower premiums for many right now. Whatever your views on healthcare, we should agree that we need to stabilize the marketplaces. I look forward to a response from the majority leader to our letter.

When will my Republican friends realize that their partisan approach to healthcare is a dead end, that the only way to truly improve our Nation's healthcare system is to finally heed Democrats' requests to come together and work in a bipartisan way? I hope our Republican colleagues realize this sooner, not later.

PRESIDENT TRUMP'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT PUTIN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, there was the G-20 and President Trump's bilateral meeting with President Putin. While a few good things came out of this summit, overall, it was an embarrassment to our country and our ideals. Clearly, the lowest moment of all was President Trump's meeting with Vladimir Putin, on several counts.

As our intelligence community has concluded, the President of Russia deliberately interfered in our elections and sought to undermine our democracy. That is not Democrats making it up. That is 17 intelligence agencies—men and women, many of whom risk their lives for us every day, people we look up to, people we admire. They are the ones who said there was interference—not Democrats, not politicians. I wish President Trump would stop saying it was Democrats who came up with this idea. It was our own intelligence community. Rather than decisively confront the Russian President on these actions—the Russian interference—the President reportedly acquiesced to Putin's denial.

To give equal credence to the findings of 17 U.S. intelligence agencies and an assertion by Mr. Putin is disgraceful. They are not equal. Our 17 intelligence agencies are far more important to us and far more credible to us than Vladimir Putin. Every American—every American—no matter their party affiliation, should take umbrage with the President of the United States equating our own hardworking, dedicated intelligence community with Mr. Putin, who has shown contempt for our democracy and has spent his professional and political career trying to undermine it.

This almost certainly paves the way—the President's actions almost certainly pave the way—for future Russian interference on our elections. If Russia feels there will be no punishment for interfering in our elections, no reprimand at all from the United States, surely they will try and try again.

President Trump went so far as to float the absolutely absurd possibility of a joint cyber security unit with the Russians. Then he backtracked after he was hailing it as one of the great things about the summit. When he got such reaction—particularly, from Senators MCCAIN and RUBIO, from his own party—he backtracked.

The thought of working with our adversary on cyber security should send chills down the backs of all Americans. It is clear that President Trump is not willing to be the guardian of American interests when it comes to Vladimir Putin. The House of Representatives must step in and fill the void by passing the Senate's tough, bipartisan sanctions bill to finally punish Russia for their intrusions in our 2016 elections.

The Founding Fathers established Congress as a check and balance on the

executive branch when necessary. The House must be that check and balance now.

Given the President's actions at the G-20, there is now even more reason for the House to pass the Senate sanctions bill, which passed 98 to 2—overwhelmingly bipartisan.

Given President Trump's casual dismissals of the findings of our intelligence community and face-value acceptance of Mr. Putin's word, there is even greater cause to tie the hands of this administration with a tough Russia sanctions bill.

Now more than ever, it is clear that President Trump should not have the final and only authority to lift sanctions on Russia. He has shown that he is willing to turn a blind eye to the direct assault on our democracy and did so this weekend in his meeting with Mr. Putin.

Congress should step up and say: President Trump, if you are not going to punish Russia for meddling with our democracy, we will.

The American people are wondering: How can the President of the United States fail to stick up for our democracy? How can the President fail to seriously challenge the man responsible for violating the sanctity of our elections?

Candidly, I am dismayed that the Republican leadership in this body and in the other has been so quiet in the wake of these events. The Republican Party's foreign policy for decades was predicated on opposition to the Soviet Union and now Russia. It was the linchpin of their foreign policy. Now, when a President of their party is soft on Russia—even after Russia blatantly interfered in our elections—we hardly hear a peep from the Republican leadership.

I certainly acknowledge, respect, and admire the words of my friends, Republican Senators MCCAIN, GRAHAM, SASSE, and RUBIO, who have spoken out and should be recognized and applauded for it. They have been the exception, not the rule. We need to hear more from the Republican leadership because this situation is getting ever more troubling.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, finally, a word on the revelation that President Trump's son, his son-in-law, and his campaign manager met with a lawyer with ties to the Kremlin with the pretext of discussing information that would be damaging to Secretary Clinton's campaign.

This revelation should be the end of the idea pushed by the administration and the President that there is absolutely no evidence of an intent by the Trump campaign to coordinate or collude. It is certainly not proof positive—we don't know what was said in the meeting—but these reports in the press at least demand further investigation.

It defies credulity that the President's campaign manager, his son, and his son-in-law, at the height of a very, very heated campaign—three people very close to the President and at the helm of that campaign—were all going to a meeting with a Russian lawyer to discuss Russian adoption. Indeed, Donald Trump, Jr., has now admitted—after he first said the purpose of the meeting was adoption—that he agreed to meet to get potentially damaging information about Hillary Clinton.

The Senate Intelligence Committee has already indicated that it will look into the possibility of coordination or collusion as part of their broader investigation. This meeting and the background behind it should be included in future document requests and additional lines of inquiry.

After providing documents to the Intelligence Committee, Donald Trump, Jr., must also testify before the committee to explain why three of the highest level members of the Trump administration thought it was appropriate to meet with a Russian source to receive information about a political opponent. We are talking about the wellspring and pride of our democracy—free and fair elections without foreign interference.

When the President of the United States is unwilling to forcibly defend our democracy, a violation of our sovereignty, face to face with its chief adversary, when we continue to learn of additional meetings between his campaign and Russian sources, when we hear that the White House is actively working to water down or stall a bill of tough Russia sanctions, we in Congress need to step up and defend the vital interests of our country. Both parties should be united in that effort because, at least for now, the President seems unwilling to do so.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, finally, on nominations, which were just mentioned in a noncamera briefing at the White House, I understand the White House is complaining about the pace of nominations, citing the obstruction of Senate Democrats. If the White House is looking for a cause of the delay, they only need to look in the mirror.

No administration in recent memory has been slower in sending nominees to the Senate. In the last few weeks, the administration has sent several nominees without all of their paperwork or their ethics agreements complete. We can't go forward until that happens.

The White House has sent nominees for the Cabinet on down without the paperwork or ethics agreements completed. That is almost unprecedented in its degree. Time and again, they have stalled on providing committees with the information they need to proceed on nominations.

After campaigning on “draining the swamp,” the Trump administration has