

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, the American people deserve better than ObamaCare.

Across the country, Americans are paying more for less under ObamaCare. Already, ObamaCare premiums have increased, on average, by more than 100 percent on the Federal exchange. Next year, ObamaCare premiums could rise by as much as 50 percent or more in States like Georgia and Maryland.

All across the country, Americans are losing choice and access. Already, Americans living in 70 percent of the counties have little or no options for ObamaCare insurance. Next year, nearly 40 percent fewer insurers have filed to participate in the ObamaCare exchanges. Many Americans face the real possibility of having no options to pick from at all.

These trends are not new—costs have been going up and choice has been going down for years—but these trends continue to get worse, and things are not likely to turn around unless we act.

ObamaCare was a direct attack on the middle class from the very start. It is a ticking timebomb today. ObamaCare's years-long hurtle toward collapse is rapidly approaching its seemingly inevitable conclusion, total meltdown, which would hurt even more Americans on top of those it has hurt already.

We can't let that happen, and we are continuing to work hard to ensure it doesn't.

After extensive consultation across the conference, numerous meetings with constituents, and intensive conversations with Members, our conference has updated last month's Better Care discussion draft with additional provisions to make it stronger. We just walked through that revised draft together. It is now available online. I encourage everyone to review it.

As before, it aims to stabilize and reform the collapsing insurance markets that have left too many with no options, and it aims to make insurance more affordable and more flexible so it is something Americans actually want to buy.

For those stuck with ObamaCare insurance they don't want or can't afford, we don't think they should be forced to buy it any longer. For those who buy insurance on an exchange and want to continue doing so, we want them to have lower premiums and more choices.

For those tired of healthcare decisions being outsourced to far-off bureaucrats, we want to transfer millions of those decisions back to them and to their doctors.

We also want to strengthen Medicaid for those who need it most, by giving States more flexibility while ensuring that those who rely on this program don't have the rug pulled out from under them. Many States want the ability to reform and improve their Medicaid Program so they can actually deliver better care at a lower cost, and we would like to dramatically expand their authority to do that. It is an idea that should significantly improve healthcare in States all across our country.

The draft we just discussed, like the one before it, addresses all of these objectives. It would again give Americans more tools for managing their own care and this time goes even further. It would again devote significant resources to the fight against the opioid crisis and this time goes even further. The revised draft improves on the previous version in a number of ways, all while retaining the fundamental goals of providing stability and improving affordability.

Now, regardless, I am sure we can expect many of the same, tired, and predictable attacks from the defenders of ObamaCare's failed status quo. It hardly matters what the draft says; they would launch the same kinds of attacks anyway.

I would remind colleagues, this is the same crowd that said ObamaCare would lower costs, they pledged it would increase choice, and they promoted the infamous broken promise—if you like your plan, you can keep your plan. They were wrong before, and they are wrong again today.

Moreover, serious ObamaCare solutions from Democrats are hard to find these days. What we have heard recently essentially boils down to this:

No. 1, apply a multibillion-dollar bandaid—no reforms, no changes, just billions more for insurers. That is the game plan of the folks on the other side.

No. 2, quadruple down on ObamaCare and pass a massive expansion of a failed idea that puts bureaucrats in control of nearly every single healthcare decision in the country. The total cost of that so-called single-payer idea could add up to \$32 trillion, according to an estimate of a leading proposal.

These are not serious solutions that Americans need to solve the real problems before us, but if Democrats would like to offer these ideas, then let's open debate on the underlying legislation so they can do that. I am sure Members will have more ideas about how we can improve this draft. The only way for anyone—Democrat, Republican, or Independent—to have that opportunity is to vote yes on opening the debate.

We expect an updated projection from the Congressional Budget Office early next week. Once that is released, we will have the opportunity to vote on the motion to proceed. That is the only way by which everyone will be able to come to the floor, share their ideas,

and have their voices heard through both robust debate and a robust amendment process.

I remain disappointed that our Democratic friends made clear early on that they did not want to engage in a serious, bipartisan effort to solve this issue. But they have a renewed opportunity to engage now. I hope they will take it. I hope every Senator will vote to open debate because that is how we change the status quo.

This is our opportunity to really make a difference on healthcare. This is our chance to bring about changes we have been talking about since ObamaCare was forced on the American people. It is our time to finally build the bridge away from ObamaCare's failures and deliver relief to those who need it.

Failure to act means more families get hurt as it continues to collapse. It also means the law's problems will grow more formidable, making them even harder to solve. That is not something any of us should be comfortable with.

So it is time to rise to the occasion. The American people deserve better than the pain of ObamaCare. They deserve better care, and the time to deliver that for them is next week.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam 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.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, after 2 weeks of delay, we have now seen the revised Republican TrumpCare bill. It appears that little has changed to the core of the bill.

The Republican TrumpCare bill still slashes Medicaid. The cuts are every bit as draconian as they were in the previous version—a devastating blow to rural hospitals, to Americans in nursing homes, to those struggling with opioid addiction, and so many more. The Republican TrumpCare bill still allows insurers to charge older Americans five times or more than they charge younger Americans. Premiums for so many people aged 55 to 64 will go way up. Americans in their sixties could be paying tens of thousands of dollars more than they do today. The Republican TrumpCare bill still blocks funding to Planned Parenthood, limiting access to affordable healthcare for millions of women.

So what is new in the bill? Well, it appears that Republicans have included a new \$60 billion tax break on health savings accounts, which only benefits those wealthy enough to afford putting money into them. For Americans who are struggling to pay for insurance coverage, for the average family who sits down on a Friday evening and says: How are we going to pay our existing bills, and for middle-income families who struggle to make ends meet, a tax break on health savings accounts will not help. It will only help wealthier Americans, who sometimes use these accounts as tax shelters.

It appears the Republican TrumpCare bill includes something like the Cruz amendment, which makes the overall bill even worse than before. The Cruz amendment causes costs to go up by letting insurers sell cut-rate insurance policies with lower premiums but huge, huge deductibles and copays, so that out-of-pocket costs would actually go up, not down, even if premiums are lower.

The Cruz amendment drives Americans with preexisting conditions into markets with unaffordable coverage. They virtually would have no coverage at all. Even Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY said the amendment would likely “annihilate the pre-existing condition requirement.” The Cruz amendment will likely cause death spirals in the insurance markets for Americans who need coverage the most. Even the conservative American Action Forum said the Cruz amendment is “the definition of a death spiral.”

From what we are seeing, the new Republican TrumpCare bill is every bit as mean as the old one, and, in one big way, it is even meaner, with the addition of something like the Cruz amendment.

Moderate Republicans looking at this bill should be able to see that the incredibly modest changes to the tax provisions—the small pot of funding for opioid abuse treatment and these other tweaks around the edges—are like a drop in the bucket compared to what the bill does to Medicaid, to seniors, and to Americans with preexisting conditions. It is clear that the core of this bill will remain until the bitter end.

So a vote on the motion to proceed will be a vote on the core of this bill. It is a vote on the idea that middle-class Americans and seniors should pay more for less healthcare. It is a vote on the idea that it should be harder for the neediest Americans to afford healthcare. It is a vote on the idea that corporations and special interests deserve another tax break.

If you are for that idea, vote yes on the motion to proceed. But my Republican friends should not be tempted by the promise of amendments to fix this bill. It is clear that the Republican leadership wants and needs to keep the core of this bill—a dagger to the heart of Medicaid and tax giveaways for corporations and special interests—to the bitter end.

Republicans keep talking about needing to change the status quo on healthcare, but you don't change the status quo to make it worse. That is what this bill would do. This is far, far worse than the status quo. We, Republicans and Democrats, can work together to actually improve our healthcare system, to stabilize the marketplaces, and to reduce the costs that average Americans pay for their healthcare, particularly for prescription drugs.

We can do it, but my Republican friends need to abandon this wrong-headed, partisan, behind-closed-doors approach, and they ought to do it on the motion to proceed next week.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, we Democrats sent a letter to our Republican colleagues laying out our principles on appropriations so that Republicans would know exactly where we stand and we could avoid the possibility of their shutting down the government. We have three principles: relief from damaging sequestration cuts, parity between defense and jobs and economic growth funding, and no poison pill riders, like the ineffective border wall. These are the same principles we laid out during the last budget negotiation, which resulted in a strong and bipartisan package.

But on Tuesday—which is why I am on the floor speaking—the House Appropriations Committee released a draft of its Homeland Security bill, which includes funding for an unnecessary, ineffective, and expensive border wall with Mexico, paid for by American taxpayers, breaking the President's promise, repeatedly given, that Mexico would pay for it. The bill also funds an unacceptable deportation force and unnecessary detention beds.

The President's budget calls for funding a new eminent domain strike force—a team of Trump lawyers that the administration wants to send to the border to take private land away from the American people to build this wall. This proposal has met with stiff resistance from homeowners living in border communities. Republicans and Democrats on both sides of the aisle have rightfully come out against this proposal. Not a single border State Republican supports the idea. The Senate should reject it outright.

If House Republicans keep on this path—the path of these poison pill amendments and dramatic cuts in programs that help working Americans—I fear they are steering us toward a train wreck.

Remember, the President said he wanted a shutdown. He tweeted earlier this year: “Our country needs a good ‘shutdown’ in September to fix mess!” He wants one. His budget director, Mick Mulvaney, has always been for a shutdown. By including border wall funding in their proposal and dramatically cutting domestic spending, House

Republicans, unfortunately, are playing right into their game.

I urge my Republican colleagues, please, let cooler heads prevail. To my Republican friends in the Senate, I would say persuade your colleagues in the House to abandon this dangerous, irresponsible path they put us on, which can only lead to a government shutdown. I guess they want it.

We should be working together on a responsible way forward on appropriations, in line with the principles we laid out which produced a successful bipartisan deal on the last budget.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, as public servants, I have always thought it is our duty to serve with dignity, integrity, and fairness to the best of our abilities. No matter where you are from or how we got here, the citizens of our States have sent us to Washington with the hope that we will do what is best for them. We hold the public's trust, and that is something that should guide us in everything we do.

Last week, I was home in Michigan for the Fourth of July. My family and other Michiganders celebrated and honored those who had fought for our independence and those who continue to defend our sacred freedom. Our American democracy is rooted in the promise of freedom and equal opportunity for every American. Our resilient Nation has persevered because of shared commitment to do what is right, even if we don't always agree on how to get there.

While home last week I had the opportunity to speak to many Michiganders and hear what was on their mind. They had a whole range of topics on their mind, but the No. 1 issue I heard was about the proposed Republican healthcare bill. Some were angry, some were confused, but most were simply scared. They are scared for their children, they are scared for their spouses, they are scared for their aging parents, and many are scared about what this bill could mean for their own health and well-being.

I wish to highlight a few of the stories shared with me in recent days. Susan from Clawson, MI, shared her unfortunate story about when she fell on hard times, unexpectedly lost her small business and with it her income.

Susan, despite all of her hard work in the past, no longer had the resources to obtain private health insurance. During this time—and it was an extremely stressful time—she also discovered she had an unidentified lump on her breast. Through some research and the help of friends, Susan was able to enroll in Medicaid and get the treatment for what she discovered was a very aggressive but treatable form of cancer.

Without Medicaid, Susan may not have gotten the treatment she needed and may have lost her life. Nobody