

Let me tell you about one where I don't think there was any disagreement. If we could have passed it tonight, it would have provided a lot of certainty and predictability to families in Ohio and around the country. It is one that passed my committee, the Finance Committee, by a strong vote—not a bipartisan vote but a unanimous vote. That is the Children's Health Insurance Program, or the CHIP program. We passed it with a unanimous vote out of committee.

People say: Well, we need to find pay-fors for it. It is about \$8 billion to do what we did, which is a 5-year extension of the program, providing certainty and predictability to families who tonight are wondering what is going to happen to this program. Are my kids going to have the kind of quality healthcare they can access through the Children's Health Program, or the CHIP program?

There are some pay-fors out there that are, again, bipartisan. A big one, which would cover nearly half of that cost, is one where you simply ensure that the Medicaid Program has more integrity. So if a third-party payer is paying, the Medicaid Program doesn't pay for it. It is a bipartisan issue, and there is an initiative we looked at for this program and could have used.

I don't get this notion that we couldn't pass it because we couldn't find the pay-fors. The pay-fors were there. I don't get it that this was controversial, because it is not. I believe that on both sides of the aisle, we wanted to resolve the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Again, with all the other issues, I understand. It is tough when you have to get to 60 votes and get this passed in order to keep the government operating, which is not a situation we should be in, but we are in. I must tell you, I am very disappointed we were not able to deal with this one issue tonight that has not been controversial and that came out of the committee with a unanimous vote—not bipartisan but unanimous.

CHIP now helps 219,000 Ohio children get the health coverage they need and 9 million children nationwide. Ohio has the tenth largest program, and CHIP has been a leading cause in driving the insurance rate down for Ohio kids. In the case of my home State, we have seen our CHIP funding being questioned because the program was authorized until the end of September. Now it is no longer authorized. We are not sure exactly how much money we have left. We think we have enough to get into February in Ohio. Some States are worried about even getting into January.

Tonight, there was a short-term extension that, as I understand it, will take the program into February, but again, it doesn't provide that long-term certainty that families are looking for.

I must tell you that I am disappointed from what I hear about the

reasons, because I asked on both sides of the aisle, and one reason I got—again, this was leadership on both sides of the aisle—is that we can't do it unless we do other things with it. It is called CHIP—Children's Health Insurance Program—but it shouldn't be a political chip. It should be taken out of politics. It should be something that we deal with separately.

I will just tell you that using it as leverage for other programs is not the way I am going to look at it and not the way we should look at it. We should have passed it tonight. We should have passed it to help protect some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Funding should be a top priority, regardless of your partisan position and regardless of the political climate. It should be out of the political fray.

I urge my colleagues, when we come back after the first of the year, let's make that a priority. Let's bring it to the floor. Let's have a vote. Let's keep it bipartisan. Maybe, it could even be unanimous. Let's give those families in Ohio—the 219,000 kids who depend on it—and the millions of families around this country the peace of mind to know that we are extending this program.

Let's do that 5-year extension, that 5-year authorization we already passed in committee. Let's take it out of this political process and put it where it belongs, which is an issue that every single Member of this body should want to address for the kids they represent.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak tonight on the tax reform and tax cut legislation. I do think it will provide the opportunity for everybody I represent to have a better future and a brighter future.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk on the Children's Health Insurance Program.

SIGNING AUTHORITY

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the junior Senator from Louisiana be authorized to sign duly enrolled bills during today's session of the Senate.

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

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I yield back my time.

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

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

NOMINATIONS REMAINING IN STATUS QUO

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that the list at the desk of

nominations received during the 115th Congress, first session, remain in status quo, notwithstanding the provisions of rule XXXI.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 525, 526, 528, and 530.

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

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Kenneth J. Braithwaite, of Pennsylvania, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Kingdom of Norway; M. Lee McClenny, of Washington, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Paraguay; Brock D. Bierman, of Virginia, to be an Assistant Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development; and Christopher Ashley Ford, of Maryland, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (International Security and Non-Proliferation).

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Braithwaite, McClenny, Bierman, and Ford nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 311.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert P. Storch, of the District of Columbia, to