

worked very hard, when we were writing the Affordable Care Act, to require insurance coverage for maternity care, to help new mothers cover the cost of obstetric services and of hospital charges for childbirth and other expenses.

The Affordable Care Act and the access to maternity care coverage it provides have made a real difference for so many people in New Hampshire and across the country.

One of those women is Samantha Fox from Bow, NH. Samantha is now a State legislator in New Hampshire, but prior to the Affordable Care Act, Samantha was denied coverage for health insurance because of a reproductive system disorder, and the insurance that she was able to get didn't provide prenatal and maternity care coverage.

Well, thanks to the ACA, she was guaranteed coverage of these vital maternity care services that were so important when she gave birth to her son Leo in 2017.

We can't go back to those days before the Affordable Care Act, when only 12 percent of health plans on the individual market covered maternity care or when women could be charged higher premiums than men for the very same coverage.

But that is exactly what the Trump administration is trying to do by expanding the availability of junk plans that are not required to cover maternity care, and that is what this administration is trying to do by urging the courts to strike down the Affordable Care Act in its entirety.

Now, in addition, at a time when 43 percent of childbirths in this country are covered and paid for by the Medicaid Program, the Trump administration continues to propose Medicaid block grants and funding caps that would fail to adequately support States for the cost of coverage for pregnant women and new mothers.

Senator CASEY was very eloquent in talking about what will happen if the effort to reduce Medicaid is successful.

Sadly, the barriers to women's healthcare that this administration has created go beyond just insurance coverage. They are also imposing significant impediments to access to family planning services.

The administration's title X gag rule would violate the provider-patient relationship by prohibiting providers who receive Federal family planning grants from informing their patients about reproductive health options, including safe and legal abortions.

In 2017, more than 16,000 Granite Staters obtained care from family planning providers that receive support through Federal title X family planning grants. This includes more than 1,200 cervical cancer screenings and nearly 1,500 breast exams that were provided by New Hampshire's Planned Parenthood facilities that, if this gag rule is allowed to stand, would then be eliminated, and women would have to get those screenings somewhere else,

and in many cases, the women would not be able to afford the cost of those screenings. The title X gag rule puts access to these and so many other vital services at risk.

The administration's barriers to family planning services extend around the world as a result of a similar global gag rule on international family planning grants.

Based on the unfortunate experience with the global gag rule, we already know that when you exclude entities like Planned Parenthood and other providers from family planning grants, you will impede access to care for vulnerable women in impoverished countries around the world, and we are now beginning to get the data from so many NGOs that provide those services.

It is ironic because people in this administration who say they support the gag rule say they do it because they are trying to reduce the number of abortions. Yet what we know is that putting on this global gag rule increases the number of unwarranted pregnancies, increases the number of unsafe abortions, and increases the number of maternal deaths in childbirth. I don't understand why the data is not convincing to those people who share the view that we should try to reduce the number of unwarranted pregnancies and reduce the number of abortions. That is why, each year, I have come together with Senators COLLINS and MURKOWSKI to lead a bipartisan charge to repeal the global gag rule and to bolster resources for international family planning. Hopefully, we will be able to pass that again this year.

In light of all of these dangerous efforts to erode protections for women's health, we need to stand together here in Congress. We need to join forces with women around the country and around the world. We need to say enough is enough. Women should be able to access health insurance for reproductive services and for family planning services, just as men can access health insurance for all of the services they need.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Connecticut.

IRAQ

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, over the Easter recess, Senator ROMNEY and I had the privilege to visit our troops and our diplomats in Iraq. They are serving us well, and they are putting their lives on the line as we partner with the Iraqis to make sure that ISIS does not reconstitute itself in Iraq or in Syria. We have taken their territory away from them, but there are still over 20,000 or so ISIS fighters and loyalists in and around the region.

Once again, our trip proved to both of us that our soldiers and our diplomats are the best in the world. We are so lucky to have them be so willing to stand on guard for us all over the

world. It may be the most important assignment today in Iraq as we continue to battle the scattered remnants of ISIS.

I don't want a President who takes the unquestioning advice of his military leaders. I want a President who is willing to push back. But nobody knows how to defeat ISIS better than the U.S. military. They effectively have done it twice. They beat al-Qaida in Iraq, and then they came back again with many partners to take territory away from ISIS. Nobody takes more seriously the threat of ISIS's reemergence or the threat of an expansionist Iran than the U.S. military. But I am here today to talk about our President's refusal, over and over again, to listen to the advice that he is being given by his generals and by his advisers at the Department of Defense. Instead, he is listening to the Iraq hawks inside the White House who think about this problem through the air-conditioned safety of their West Wing offices with little regard to how things actually work in the real world on the ground of the Middle East.

I want to talk about our two main objectives today in Iraq and in Iran, and I want to frame this in the context of today's disastrous news that the Iranians are restarting elements of their nuclear weapons program.

First, let's talk about a bipartisan commitment that we share, and that is the commitment to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. In and of itself, it would be a world disaster. It would present an immediate existential threat to our partners in Israel, and it would result in an arms race throughout the region that would be exacerbated by the fact that in the last 2 years, the Trump administration has made the decision to engage in a new nuclear partnership with the Saudis, which puts the Saudis on a quicker path to obtaining a nuclear weapon in case that arms race sets off.

What the Trump administration has done is to goad Iran into restarting their nuclear weapons program. They announced last night that they are pulling out of their side of the Iran nuclear agreement and that they are going to start to, once again, take steps that could lead them to a quick breakout to a nuclear weapon.

Those who opposed the agreement that President Obama signed did so, in part, because they said that it could allow Iran to restart its nuclear weapons program in 10 to 13 years and that 10 to 13 years wasn't enough security to sign on to that agreement. Well, President Trump has now managed to press the Iranians into restarting their nuclear weapons program in 4 years. We didn't get 10 years; we didn't get 13 years; we got 4 years, and Iran is back on a potential path to a nuclear weapon.

The President will say that he is imposing crippling new sanctions on Iran, such that they will come back to the negotiating table. But let's be honest.

There is not a plausible path for that to happen in the next year and a half of the President's term. It took President Obama two terms to engage in multi-lateral sanctions to get the Iranians to the negotiating table. There are no credible analysts of Iranian behavior or of politics in the Middle East that will tell you that the Iranians are going to come back to the negotiating table in the next 12 months, in part, because the balance of powers has totally flipped.

Under the Obama administration, it was the United States, Europe, China, and Russia on one side and the Iranians on the other side. President Trump has managed to flip that alignment, such that it is now the Iranians, the Europeans, the Chinese, and the Russians on one side and the United States isolated on the other. If you don't believe me, just take a look at the statements that many of those parties sent out in response to Iran's decision last night, effectively aligning themselves with the Iranians' decision to restart their nuclear program instead of aligning themselves, as they had for years, with the U.S. position of strict nonproliferation.

It is a disaster for the United States that Iran has restarted its nuclear weapons program. It is a massive failure of President Trump's strategy, but it is only one element of a meandering Iranian strategy that is accruing to the national security detriment of the United States.

Let's talk about our second primary objective in this region. I referenced it at the outset. It is to prevent the re-emergence and reconstitution of ISIS inside Iraq and Syria. We have bad news to report there as well.

The Trump administration took another step that had been counseled against by his generals and by his military leaders, and that is the designation of the IRGC—an element of the Iranian military—as a terrorist group. Now, nobody could come to this floor and defend the actions of Iran or the IRGC. They have absolutely supported terrorism in the region for years. They supported Shia militias inside Iraq that were shooting at and killing American troops. Yet, notwithstanding that activity, our military leaders and our diplomats inside Iraq cautioned the administration against making this designation because weighing the costs of it against the benefits to our military leaders was a clear case.

The costs are this: By telling these militias inside Iran that they have to make a choice today between the United States and this newly designated terrorist group, the Iranian militias make the choice easily. They align themselves with Iran, their neighbor, not the United States. The effect of our decision is to push more of these militia groups closer to the Iranians.

Second, we no longer can talk diplomatically to the groups that have associations with the IRGC, and that is a

lot of these militia groups. That means that the United States effectively takes itself out of the game diplomatically. We no longer have the ability to engage in political reconciliation in the country like we used to.

All of this presses the case of ISIS, as they are able to make the case that Baghdad is more and more leaning toward Shia interests and Iranian interests. As the United States isn't there in order to press the reconciliation case, ISIS has an opportunity to reemerge. All of this also accrues to the benefit of those interested in Iraq who want the U.S. military out.

Just months ago there was an effort to push a bill through Parliament to expel the United States and our continued hard line on Iran. As much as it may make sense to the air-conditioned offices of the White House to allow those interests in Iraq to, potentially, successfully litigate the case to push the U.S. military out of that country, it would, once again, open the gates to ISIS.

As far as I can tell, the administration's policy is to set in motion a series of escalatory actions with respect to Iran that has no end game with no logical conclusion. There isn't a diplomatic process at the end of this rainbow. The President has a year and a half left in his term. There isn't enough time, and there is no willingness in Iran and no partners on our side, as I have mentioned.

So what is the other alternative—military action? An invasion of Iran would be an unmitigated national security disaster. It would make the mistake of invading Iraq look positively benign, in retrospect. There is no appetite in America for such an endeavor, and there is no way the votes exist in Congress to authorize such an action.

The risk, of course, is that we fall into war by accident or through a series of events that appear as an accident. When you commit yourself to such an unplanned and unscripted series of military and diplomatic escalations, as the Trump administration has, and you have no working channel of communication to settle misunderstandings, then accidents can easily happen. Shots can be fired; lives can be lost, and then our options suddenly narrow. That is the real risk of the path we are on today. What scares the heck out of me is that it is a path that is seemingly being made up day by day, and it is a path that is opposed by our military and that is laid out without any meaningful input from our diplomats who are on the ground in the region. That is a potential recipe for disaster.

It shouldn't matter whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, a liberal or a conservative because messing around in the Middle East, in countries like Iran and Iraq, with no strategy and no clear set of goals should send chills down every Senator's spine.

I yield the floor.

NOMINATION OF JANET DHILLON

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I want to say a few words about the nomination of Janet Dhillon to be Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which we know by the shorthand EEOC. I will vote against her nomination. I have voted against it in the past in committee.

But let me tell you about the EEOC. We need a little reminder of this once in a while. It is a bipartisan Commission that for decades has worked to protect American workers from discrimination in the workplace—all kinds of discrimination.

Many lawyers know that if you bring an action in a State court or in a Federal court, the first step is that you have to go through all of your administrative remedies. So if you bring a Federal lawsuit or a civil action based upon discrimination, the first thing you have to do is to go to the EEOC. Before you can get to a Federal district court, you have to go through the EEOC. So it becomes the first court, in essence. It is not technically a court, but it becomes the first place you go to have your "discrimination in the workplace" claim considered.

During that time, since the founding or the beginnings of the EEOC, people in both parties in the Senate have worked together to move forward nominees from both parties in tandem so the Commission could continue its essential work.

Today this bipartisan process is being cast aside by the majority in the Senate because no Democratic nominee is being considered along with Janet Dhillon, who has been proposed by the administration. My colleagues in the majority have decided to abandon this bipartisan cooperation.

We know that the EEOC plays a critical role in protecting workers from all forms—all forms—of workplace discrimination and in ensuring that all workers have equal access to employment opportunities.

Another point that is important is that the EEOC is currently in the middle of collecting data on pay gaps faced by women in the workplace, and the EEOC's leadership is badly needed so that we can work to eliminate workplace sexual harassment—still a big problem where we have a long way to go.

So instead of working with Democrats to make their sure that all—all—EEOC positions are filled so the Commission can undertake this work, the majority is instead working only to advance the Republican nominees put forward by the White House.

This is not how the Senate should work. It certainly is not how the Senate should work as it relates to the EEOC, and the most significant losers here are American workers. They will pay the price because of the EEOC not having more nominations that are bipartisan.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.