

have literally spent weeks and weeks and days and hours on this—Evan Schatz and Mike Spahn and John Righter and the others who are sitting behind us tonight—as well as Senator SESSIONS and all of his staff.

It is a tribute to their hard work and my lost voice that we are sitting here tonight ready to take the next step to get our country back on a better fiscal path.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I also would like to thank the staff. My group is here. And I say to Senator MURRAY, your team is fabulous.

We work hard on bills that come through the Senate, and there are a lot of challenges. But few are bigger than this, with all these amendments—hundreds of them that came through—and it was a real challenge.

I congratulate the staff, I congratulate the Senator's team, and I hope we can continue to have good relations as we go forward and work together.

I would mention Marcus Peacock, my staff director, who was fabulous. He enjoyed every minute of this. I asked him how he was doing, and he said: I am going to be sorry tomorrow when it is over. But maybe that is a sign of sickness. I do not know.

I want to express my appreciation to my staff: Dan Kowalski, Bill Beach, Greg D'Angelo, Gene Emmans, George Everly, Matt Giroux, Brittany Godwin, Tori Gorman, Graham Hixon, Andrew Herther, Chris Jackson, Cari Kelly, Joseph McCormack, Greg McNeill, Carlton Milsap, Marcus Peacock, Kim Proctor, John Selden, William Smith, Paul Winfree, Stephen Miller, Andrew Logan, Garrett Murch, and Katie Moses. I think that is everybody. Tori Gorman has been back there in the center of that zoo and did a great job for us trying to work on these amendments.

So, again, I would like to thank Senator MURRAY for her leadership, helping us get through this difficult time, and it is good to say that as of this time, 5 a.m., there has not been a day without a budget being passed in the Senate.

(Laughter.)

Mrs. MURRAY. 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. PRYOR. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. PRYOR. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT ANNIVERSARY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, three years ago tomorrow, President Obama signed into law the Affordable Care Act. This landmark law will extend health insurance coverage to millions of uninsured Americans when the reforms are fully implemented next year. Getting to this point has been an arduous process. But in the end, this achievement proved that real reform is possible, and that the voices of so many Americans who over the years have called on their leaders to act have finally been heard.

Since its passage, Americans have seen the immediate benefits of the Affordable Care Act and 3 years later, those improvements continue. Seniors on Medicare who have high-cost prescriptions are continuing to receive help when trapped within the coverage gap known as the doughnut hole. The Affordable Care Act completely closes the coverage gap by 2020, and the new law makes it easier for seniors to afford prescription drugs in the meantime. In 2010, more than 7,000 Vermonters received a \$250 rebate to help cover the cost of their prescription drugs when they hit the doughnut hole. Last year alone, nearly 6,400 Vermonters with Medicare received a 50-percent discount on their covered brand-name prescriptions, resulting in an average savings of \$765 per person. Since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, more than 5,000 young adults in Vermont have gained health insurance coverage under these reforms, which allow young adults to stay on their parents' plans until their 26th birthdays. The improvements we are seeing in Vermont go on and on: in 2011 and 2012, 71 million Americans and 151,000 Vermonters with private insurance gained access to and received preventative screening coverage with no deductible or copay, including more than 80,000 Medicare beneficiaries. These are just a few of the dozens of consumer protections included in the law that are benefiting Vermonters and all Americans every day, and in many ways.

The law goes into full swing next year as even more consumer protections are implemented and millions more Americans gain access to health insurance coverage. Beginning in January, insurance companies will no longer be allowed to deny coverage to individuals with preexisting health conditions or to charge higher premiums based on health status or gender. Unfortunately, estimates show that 44,000 Vermonters currently do not have health insurance, but with the Medicaid expansion contained in the Affordable Care Act, 84 percent of these Vermonters will qualify for Medicaid or a premium tax credit. Also important to Vermonters, to assist

Vermont with our State's work on implementing Vermont's State-based health insurance exchange—or marketplace—Vermont has received more than \$125,000,000 in grants for research and for information technology development, as well as almost \$3,480,000 for maternal health programs. These tangible initiatives help at-risk families gain the support they need to improve their children's health and ability to learn, and they help prevent child abuse.

I was proud as well to work with Senator GRASSLEY and others to include strong anti-fraud provisions in the law that already have helped prevent and detect fraudulent activities that in the past have cost American taxpayers multiple millions of dollars each year. Thanks in part to these efforts, \$4.2 billion was returned to taxpayers last year alone.

In only 3 years, Vermonters across our State have seen the many benefits of health care reform unfold in their lives. I see and hear about these improvements and pocketbook savings in visits to every corner of our State. At home in Middlesex and throughout Vermont, whether I am in the grocery store, at the gas pump, or at church, I am constantly reminded of how important access to quality affordable health care is to individuals and families. I applaud Vermont's efforts to expand the Affordable Care Act's reach even further to help every resident secure health insurance. I am proud that the Affordable Care Act offers Vermont the foundation it needs to reach this goal, and I look forward to working to see that it is met.

Regrettably, opponents of the Affordable Care Act continue to misleadingly attack the law in an attempt to undermine its implementation. The moment President Obama signed this bill into law, opponents sought to continue their political battle by challenging the landmark legislation in the courts. With the legal challenges now nearly resolved, we are now seeing amendments filed to every bill we consider on the floor, aimed at repealing or gutting the Affordable Care Act. In fact, on the budget resolution we are considering today, dozens of amendments have been filed in an effort to block the Affordable Care Act's implementation, to undermine its success in making lives better across the land, or to repeal the law completely. This is unfortunate, it is shortsighted, and it is cynical. Even more shameful is the budget resolution considered and passed by the House this week. The House-passed budget would make drastic changes to the Medicaid Program causing 14 to 20 million Americans to lose health coverage; it would replace Medicare with a voucher scheme costing seniors at least \$6000 more per year; and would completely repeal all the consumer protections included in the Affordable Care Act.

The Affordable Care Act is not perfect, but in the true interests of the