

world. The Marshall Islands—a thousand islands make up the Marshall Islands—55,000 people live there. These islands are being washed away with the new waves they have never seen before.

Climate change is here. We are doing nothing about it. They are spending all of our time, the American taxpayers' time, trying to repeal a law that has been in effect for 4 years.

We should be doing something about immigration reform. They talk about wanting to do something for the economy. Try passing immigration reform. It creates to the positive \$1 trillion. It would reduce our debt by \$1 trillion. Let's do that. Let's fix our broken tax system.

We should be doing those things, not relitigating 4-year-old policy battles. But instead of working with Democrats to effectively implement ObamaCare or to pass new laws that benefit middle-class families, Republicans are obsessed with fighting a real old battle, and they are doing it at taxpayer expense.

Instead of standing with millions of Americans who are already benefiting from ObamaCare, Republicans are standing with insurance companies that would return us to a time when profits came before people. That is the way it works.

Since President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, insurance companies can no longer discriminate against children with preexisting conditions. That is a good deal. If you have a child with diabetes, that boy or girl cannot be denied insurance. If they have epilepsy, they cannot be denied insurance. And in a short few months all Americans will no longer be able to be denied insurance coverage because of a preexisting illness. They can no longer raise your rates for no reason. They can no longer drop your coverage if you get sick. That is the law today.

Today children can no longer be denied insurance, as I have indicated, because they are born with a disease or a disability. And that, I repeat, will soon be extended to all Americans no matter their age. And listen to this one: Very soon being a woman will no longer be considered a preexisting condition, as it was before ObamaCare passed.

In my relatively sparsely populated State of Nevada, tens of thousands of seniors have saved tens of millions of dollars on medicines because the Affordable Care Act has helped close the gap on prescription drug coverage.

More than 3 million young people, including 33,000 young Nevadans, have been able to stay on their parents' health policies until they are 26 years old—3 million. Hundreds of thousands of businesses that already offer their employees health insurance are getting tax credits for doing the right thing.

In a few months almost 130 million Americans with preexisting conditions—and what are some of these preexisting conditions; I talked about it generally a minute ago: high blood pressure, all kinds of things that hap-

pen as you get older—will have access to reasonably priced coverage, no matter their high blood pressure or their heart condition or whatever the situation might be. And 25 million Americans who cannot afford health insurance today will be offered health insurance through the exchanges.

Republicans have been trying for years to erase these gains and force millions of American families once again to rely on the most expensive care in America today, which is where? It is emergency rooms. Hospitals hate it because their bad debt goes up, and all it does is drive up the cost of insurance. The care is not as good as it would be if they could go when they first get sick. They go there out of desperation, and that is what I assume the Republicans want everyone to do. Everyone can go to an emergency room, but it is so expensive and does not do the trick.

So punishing hard-working congressional staff, who put in long hours because they believe in public service—that is, the work we do here in Congress—will not roll back the benefits of ObamaCare. Punishing congressional staffers will not prevent millions of Americans from gaining the health insurance they need and deserve next year. But it will hurt thousands of men and women, including Senator VITTER's colleagues and his own staff.

Instead of willfully denying that ObamaCare is the law or purposely trying to derail its implementation, it is time for Senator VITTER to help us improve the law of the land and ensure every American has access to the kind of care Members of Congress enjoy already, as do 150 million other Americans who get health care through their employers.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

NAVY YARD TRAGEDY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this morning all of us are thinking about yesterday's tragic events at the Navy Yard, and we are also thinking, in particular, of the brave men and women of our military and the sacrifices they make day in and day out on our behalf.

Once again I would like to extend condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives or were injured in this terrible, terrible shooting. Know that your country is with you in these most difficult moments.

I would also like, again, to express sincere gratitude to all the first responders and the medical personnel and law enforcement officers from so many different agencies who worked together to keep all of us informed—and most of all safe—throughout the day.

CONSTITUTION DAY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, 226 years ago today about three dozen patriots helped form a more perfect union when they signed their names to a document that guides us still. The U.S. Constitution and the timeless principles that inform it have endured, ensuring liberty and freedom for the people of this country through war and peace, turmoil and prosperity.

So on this September 17, like every Constitution Day, we take a moment to reflect on just how fortunate we are to live in a nation that, unlike any other before or since, was founded on an idea. A big part of that idea is the fact that our rights come not from men but from the Creator, and that for this reason they cannot be taken away.

That is the context in which our Constitution was written, and it is the context of the Bill of Rights that was added to it, and it is just one of the things that makes America exceptional.

The first thing that every Senator, Congressman, or President does upon assuming office is take an oath to uphold the U.S. Constitution. On this Constitution Day I join my fellow lawmakers in recommitting myself to that solemn oath, to doing everything I can to ensure that the principles of constitutional self-government are adhered to and defended in Washington. This glorious document that binds us is the guarantor of our freedom and the light that continues to guide our people.

Today we remember that with pride—and with optimism about the future of this great country.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business until 11:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the majority controlling the first 30 minutes and the Republicans controlling the next 30 minutes.

The Senator from Illinois.

IMPORTANT VALUES IN AMERICA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, flags across America are being flown at half-mast this morning because of the terrible tragedy which occurred out that door 1½ miles away yesterday.

Men and women who worked for our Department of Defense to keep America safe reported to work as usual on a

Monday morning, and then tragedy struck. A gunman appeared with an assault rifle, several other weapons. At the end of it, 12 innocent people died, another dozen or so seriously injured.

This Capitol was in shock. It was locked down at some point to ward off the possibility there were other shooters and more danger outside. We watched as the people who worked at the Navy Yard and those who worked in adjoining buildings waited patiently for the police to do their important and courageous work. At the end of the day, they showed television footage of these employees being bused away from the Navy Yard to a safe metro location to return home—all but 12 of them who, sadly, lost their lives through this senseless gun tragedy.

We read the papers this morning trying to understand what could possibly motivate a person to do this. As we read the background of the shooter, it was clear there were moments in his life when he had used a firearm to shoot the tires of a car that he thought should not be parked in his driveway, shooting a gun in his own apartment that went through the ceiling to an adjoining apartment. Those sorts of things might have been warning signals. Questions are raised—How could a man with that kind of a background end up getting the necessary security clearance for a military contractor to go into this Navy Yard, to be permitted to go into this Navy Yard? How did he get these weapons into this Navy Yard; an assault rifle and other firearms—questions that still remain to be answered.

God forbid we go on with business as usual today and not understand what happened yesterday.

What happened yesterday brings into question some important values in America. If we value our right for ourselves and our families and our children to be safe, if we value this Constitution, if we value the right of every American to enjoy their liberties with reasonable limitations, then we need to return to issues that are of importance.

There was an issue before the Senate several months ago—a bipartisan amendment offered by Senators MANCHIN and TOOMEY that would have taken an extra step to keep guns out of the hands of those who have a history of felonies or people who are mentally unstable. The vast majority of Americans think this is common sense. We can protect the right of law-abiding citizens to use guns in a responsible, legal way for sporting, hunting, self-defense, but we have to do everything we can to keep guns out of the hands of those who would misuse them: felons who have a history of misusing firearms; the mentally unstable who cannot be trusted to have a firearm.

But today we pause and reflect on the lives lost, I hope the lessons learned. I had a hearing scheduled this morning before the Senate Judiciary Committee on a controversial issue involving firearms. In light of what hap-

pened yesterday, in light of the uncertainty of our schedule today, I am re-scheduling that hearing. It is an important one, and I want to say to those who are following it that it will be re-scheduled. But at this point in time we have decided to postpone it for today, to another day in the near future.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let's talk for a minute about the Vitter amendment that is on the floor. One-half of all Americans have a common experience. The experience is this: They get health insurance where they work—one-half of all Americans. For virtually all of them, their employer pays for part of their health insurance premium and the employer gets a tax break. If you own a company and offer health insurance to your employees, we have what we call the employer's exclusion for health care benefits. In other words, what you pay for your employees' health insurance is excluded from your income for tax purposes. It is one of the most expensive exclusions in the Tax Code, but it is a valuable one because it encourages businesses to offer health insurance to their employees, which is important for those families, important for our Nation.

Of course, when it comes to the Federal Government, the same rule applies. The employer—the Federal Government—offers health insurance to its employees under what is known as the Federal Employees' Health Benefits Program. Eight million Americans, representing Federal employees and their families, get their health insurance through the Federal Employees' Health Benefits Program. It includes Members of Congress. We do not have a special health insurance plan. We have the same plan that millions of Federal employees have. And our staff enjoy those same privileges.

Well, now we are in a period of transition because of the new Affordable Care Act.

This Affordable Care Act says that from this point forward Members of Congress as well as their staff members will no longer be insured by the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program but instead will become part of the insurance exchanges that were created. These exchanges, which are going to be in virtually every State because of State sponsorship, Federal sponsorship, or shared responsibility, will offer health insurance plans across America so that those who currently do not have health insurance today will be able to apply for a plan under the insurance exchange. If they are extremely low-income individuals, they will get help—subsidies and tax treatment that will help them pay for their premiums. The notion is that no matter where you live you will have access to health insurance.

The health insurance offered by these exchanges and by every other company in America will change because this

law—change for the better. Senator REID spoke about it earlier.

Preexisting conditions. How many of us do not have a preexisting condition or somebody in our family with a preexisting condition? Perhaps someone in our family was treated for cancer or diabetes or even a mental illness. In the past health insurance companies could discriminate against you and say: Sorry, we do not offer health care plans to cancer survivors. Well, that is no longer the case. This new law, the Affordable Care Act—so-called ObamaCare—says that health insurance policies from this point forward have to cover preexisting conditions not just in children but adults as well. The Republicans are saying: We want to repeal that. We do not want to put that new provision in the law. We do not want to require insurance companies to cover those with preexisting conditions.

There is another change in the law. Some insurance policies today have limits on how much they will pay. Well, I can tell you, be careful. If your health insurance plan says: We will cover your bills, say, up to \$100,000, be careful. You could go in tomorrow—or someone in your family—and be diagnosed with a cancer condition requiring extensive medical care that far exceeds the \$100,000. Under ObamaCare there are no limits on health insurance protection. If you have a terrible illness or if someone in your family does, the insurance policy will cover you. The Republicans want to repeal this provision so that they can set limits on health insurance policy limits, which could literally bankrupt a family with a terrible medical condition with which they are trying to deal. That is one of the provisions in ObamaCare that the Republicans want to repeal.

The issue on the floor today is the Vitter amendment. Senator VITTER is from Louisiana. He came to the floor last week and he said: Since Members of Congress and their staffs are now going into these insurance exchanges, it is time for us to eliminate the employer contribution for Members of Congress and their staffs. They have to pay it all, 100 percent of the premium, unlike 150 million Americans who get insurance through their employer and the employee pays a portion of it.

When it comes to congressional staff and Members of Congress, no employer contribution, pay it all. Well, it turns out that is exactly the opposite of the way Senator VITTER voted on the floor of the Senate on an amendment offered by Senator GRASSLEY, No. 3564 on the Affordable Care Act. Senator VITTER voted, during the debate on this issue, to protect the right of congressional employees and others on the employer contributions. Now he has reversed himself. Now he says: No employer contribution. This is unfair. It is unfair to do this to the employees of the Senate as well as the Members. All we are asking is that this group of individuals be