

from a doctor they choose at a lower cost. This is what health care reform was supposed to be about in the first place.

It is so interesting. Just pick up the papers. Yesterday, March 12, the Washington Post: "Health Exchange Signups Slowed in Past Month." The New York Times: "Health Care Enrollment Falls Short of Goal, With Deadline Approaching. Signing Up for Insurance, But Well Below Targets."

Then, so many questions are asked of the White House and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. The headline in Politico today: "W.H. Playing Dumb on ACA Enrollments, Insurers Say."

I think the President needs to come clean with the American people and tell them about what a disaster his health care law has become, how it has impacted their lives, how few people have actually been able to sign up—or have been able to but have found the cost is too high for them to sign up—and admit to the American people that when they talk about some of these numbers of sign-ups, many of those are people who got cancellation notices. They are not newly-insured individuals.

A study out last week shows that only about one in four people who have actually signed up on the Web site didn't have insurance before. So the people this was intended to help are not being helped. Many people are being harmed.

It is time to work together to help patients get the care they need from the doctor they choose at lower costs.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The assistant majority leader.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, across the country every day millions of Americans are working in low-wage jobs, going back to school to increase their skills in order to pay their bills and take care of their families. They do their best to balance work and family obligations, but too many moms and dads really struggle with the high cost of quality, safe childcare.

One out of three families with young children earns less than \$25,000 a year, and childcare can cost \$4,800 to \$16,000 a year. In many parts of the country childcare for two children now exceeds average rental payments.

According to a recent report by Child Care Aware America, in more than half

the States—including my own State of Illinois—it costs families more to put an infant in childcare than to cover tuition and fees in a public college. In many parts of the country, childcare for children now exceeds average rental payments. Low-income families spend almost half their salaries on childcare. It is a significant part of the family's budget. Child care and development block grant is an important program that helps low-income working families with the cost of childcare and afterschool programs. This program serves more than 1.6 million children in the United States every month. In Illinois, more than 50,000 children receive support.

As we learn more about the significance of the first few years in the life of a child's development, it is not enough just to improve access; we have to improve the quality of childcare for young children. Children in their early years are facing some of the most important moments of development, and their experiences in the first few years could literally shape their young lives. Early childhood education gives kids the solid foundation they need, not just to kindergarten but beyond. Working parents who don't have good options for quality childcare face an unfair dilemma.

Just ask Tabatha Okamoto of Chicago, IL. Tabatha has faced the challenge of finding adequate childcare for her son since he was an infant. On days when she cannot find a spot in a childcare center she hopes that maybe a family member or maybe a neighbor will be able to take care of him. She worries about losing her job, and she was almost fired because there were so many days she was late because of childcare issues.

Even when she finds reliable childcare, she still has a tough time figuring out how to pay for it. Tabatha is a good mom, but she has a lot of expenses and a low-income job. She pays her rent, health insurance, and other bills and \$800 monthly for her son to attend Little Fox Day School in Lincoln Square Center. It would be too much for her to handle on her own. Because of this program being debated on the floor of the Senate, Tabatha's out-of-pocket costs are now between \$250 and \$375 a month for this daycare at Little Fox Day School. It is less than half. It is still a sacrifice to come up with \$250 to \$400 a month, but at least she has a fighting chance to make sure her son has good daycare. More importantly, this program is giving Tabatha the peace of mind to know her son is in the right place when she goes to work every day.

It has been more than 20 years since we started this block grant. We need to update it. The grant program before us on the floor today, the child care and development block grant, would make much-needed updates to the law, expanding access to toddlers and infants and lower income families, strengthening health and safety standards and

training, and ensuring the program is meeting the needs of children with disabilities, and expanding background checks for childcare providers.

I want to thank Senators BARBARA MIKULSKI and TOM HARKIN, who have been champions of children and working Americans, for all the work they put into this bill. I want to thank Senator RICHARD BURR on the other side of the aisle and LAMAR ALEXANDER as well for making this a true bipartisan effort.

I hope my colleagues will join me today when this bill comes up for a vote. This is the kind of bipartisan bill we all should support. Working moms and dads need peace of mind knowing their kids are in a safe place that would help their children develop in the right way.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I take this time to talk about the child care and development block grant bill that is before us and will be before us soon. I want to congratulate my colleagues, Senator MIKULSKI for her leadership on this bill, and Senator HARKIN, Senator ALEXANDER, and Senator BURR. This is truly a bipartisan effort, and we very much appreciate the child care and development block grant. It is critically important.

The last time we authorized this program was 1996. I know that very well because I was serving in the House of Representatives at the time and had the opportunity to be the ranking member on the Human Resources Subcommittee in the Ways and Means Committee that was considering welfare reform and childcare, and how we could reward families for work, and how our welfare system could become a transitional program rather than a permanent program that would allow people, particularly moms, to be able to get into the workforce, stay in the workforce and climb up the economic ladder.

As part of welfare reform we recognized we had to do things about the major cost concerns of someone, a mom, giving up her welfare in order to go to work. One of those issues was health care. We passed transitional health care for people coming off of cash assistance. We also had to deal with childcare, because childcare is an extremely costly part of being able to get into the workforce.

In 1996 we consolidated many programs that were out there. We coordinated eligibility. There were different eligibility rules for many of these programs. We simplified the rules so we could get maximum dollars of help for people who entered the workforce. The goal was self-sufficiency through education, training, and being able to get a job.

Today, under the CCDBG, under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program, there are 1.6 million eligible children. It is not just a safe environment for those children, because 70 percent of their parents are working—not just a safe environment,

it is early childhood education. These children who are in childcare will do better later in life. There have been many studies that verify this.

This is a win-win situation, providing a safe environment for children so their parents can work and educational opportunity for the children at the same time. It pays off big-time for the workforce. A TANF study showed that parents who had their children in childcare for 2 years or more were more likely to remain in the employment field. So it provides stable employment, help for the child, and a win-win situation.

The eligibility for the program is it cannot exceed 85 percent of the State median income, to give you an idea of the type of people we are talking about who benefit from this program.

In Maryland, for a family of two the maximum income is \$24,000 and for a family of four the maximum income is \$35,000. In my State, Maryland, the average cost for childcare for an infant is about \$12,000 a year. For a child over 4 years of age, it is about \$9,000 a year.

We heard about the income levels and how a family is eligible for this program. It is clear that low-wage families cannot afford childcare on their own. We need to help, and that is what this program does, so that they can move up the economic ladder and not be a burden on the cash-assistance program.

Today, as we did prior to 1996, we have combined discretionary and mandatory programs for our childcare. Today discretionary spending is at \$2.36 billion and \$2.9 billion in mandatory spending.

The legislation before us also makes improvements, as it should. It allows the States to develop 13 specific health and safety standards, such as first aid and CPR, and SIDS, sudden infant death syndrome. It is keeping our children safer in childcare by having safety standards that are developed. It requires the States to do inspections of childcare centers, comprehensive background checks for those who are involved in childcare, online information, more transparency in the program, and additional State flexibility on how they can set priorities within the childcare program. That is exactly what federalism should be.

The Federal Government establishes a broad policy that we want to see families self-sufficient, we want to make sure there is a safe environment for children, and we want to make sure we do this in a way that is consistent with our national priorities. We also need to give flexibility to the State and local governments to be able to set their priorities to meet the needs of their citizens, and that is what this bill does.

I will take a moment now to give real-life examples of how this program is critically important to our community. A great example is the Judy Centers of Maryland. We have 25 Judy Centers in Maryland. They are named after Congressman STENY HOYER's wife Judy, who died of cancer in 1997. Judy was a

longtime advocate for quality early childhood education and comprehensive family support services. I knew Judy very well, and she was an incredibly dedicated leader and advocate for our children.

I have a couple of specific examples from the Judy Center as to how the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program is critically important to their existence. According to the testimony given before a committee, Judy Center employees discovered a dad who lost his job and a mom who only worked part time. They could not make ends meet or look for jobs or go on interviews because they had no childcare for their 2- and 3-year-old children. The Judy Center enrolled them in KinderCare, a childcare partner, and provided tuition assistance.

Since they lost their health insurance when their dad became unemployed, they were given an application for the Maryland CHIP program, the health insurance program. The 3-year-old had a behavioral issue and was referred to the Judy Center behavioral specialist, who worked with her extensively. She also received tutoring services.

Dad is now employed full time. Thanks to safe childcare, dad is now employed full time. After much encouragement, mom enrolled in adult education classes and received her GED. She has also completed a medical assistance program and is now enrolled in the College of Southern Maryland to pursue an associates degree. The children are now in elementary school and are doing well in school.

I could give many more examples like this family. I could talk about many other success stories that would not have been possible without the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program, and that is why it is critically important that we reauthorize the program.

I see my colleague from Maryland is on the Senate floor. I congratulate her for her leadership in getting this bill to the floor—not just getting this bill to the floor, which is important, but doing it in a way that we can get it passed in the Senate and accomplish our objectives so we can get women into the workforce and have early childhood education to help children succeed in life. We can help American families and strengthen America.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, before my colleague leaves the floor, I want to express my appreciation for his statement today and in particular when he spoke about the Judy Center, which has meant so much in Maryland to show the way childcare should be addressed. The Judy Center is a family-oriented organization that is focused on children. Their so-called wrap-around services help the child not only

with all that is necessary in a well-run childcare facility, but they also work with the family, strengthen the family, and help the family by giving them information about other opportunities to improve their life, such as educational benefits. I think it is a national model. If I had my way, I would like to adopt the Judy Center model throughout America.

Again, I thank the Senator for speaking about the Judy Center.

I also thank my friend for his steadfast advocacy for children, the way he has worked for the children's health program, particularly focusing on the dental services for that little boy Deamonte, the child who died. He is a real fighter.

Senator CARDIN is also well known for getting rid of lead paint poisoning in Maryland. So now he wants the lead out of bureaucracy and the lead out of the Senate. Again, I thank him for his comments.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the bill.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ACT OF 2014

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 1086, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows: A bill (S. 1086) to improve the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Harkin amendment No. 2811, to include rural and remote areas as underserved areas identified in the State plan.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I am going to give a recap of where we are and then note the absence of a quorum as we sort through our amendments.

This is the second day of the Senate's consideration of S. 1086, the child care and development block grant reauthorization on which 1.5 million American children depend, including 20,000 children from the State of Maryland. We have been working on this bill for over 2 years, and now it is our second day of moving this legislation.

We have made an impressive amount of progress. Yesterday the Senate agreed to nine amendments—three by rollcall vote and six by voice vote. We had a great group of bipartisan amendments. Of the nine amendments that were adopted, three were sponsored by Republicans, two were sponsored by Democrats, and four amendments were bipartisan. The amendments yesterday improved the underlying bill. They streamlined Federal early learning programs; made sure tribes get the funding they need; required States to develop childcare disaster plans; and ensures that CDBG, as it is known, also