

crash of Vermont's even more ambitious version of ObamaCare. Many on the left thought Vermont's experiment would light the way forward on health care. In the end, it turned out to be a remarkable failure and, as one Vermonter put it, "an unending money pit." The State's top health official now says that ObamaCare's exchanges "just [weren't] set up for success." That is in Vermont.

ObamaCare is hitting small and midsized businesses, too. These are the engines of job growth in our economy, but too many of them are now facing premium hikes of nearly 20 percent because of ObamaCare. One 54-person company in Connecticut is facing up to \$100,000 in new costs. Its owner says that ObamaCare "punishes companies for hiring new, younger workers," and, indeed, the uncertainty is causing her company to hire temporary workers rather than create permanent jobs.

So while it is possible that ObamaCare will survive its latest crisis, that is not going to change the grim reality of this law. It won't change the broken promises, it won't change the repeated failures, and it won't change the fact that ObamaCare has led to skyrocketing costs for taxpayers, the small businesses that drive the American dream, and, most importantly, for middle-class Americans who work hard every single day and play by the rules.

It is about time the President and his party worked constructively with us to start over on real health reform that can lower costs and increase choice instead of hurting the middle class the way ObamaCare does. That is what the American people deserve.

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#### BURMA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final matter, several weeks ago, I had the pleasure of meeting with Shwe Mann, speaker of the Burmese Parliament, on his visit to Washington. It was the third time we met. We had a cordial but frank discussion about the challenges and opportunities facing his country in 2015. There are obviously many issues that fall into both categories.

When it comes to challenges, there is the need for the government to do all it can to protect and assume responsibility for members of a long-suffering religious minority group, the Rohingya, thousands of whom have been forced to take to the high seas on dangerous makeshift vessels to escape persecution. There is the longstanding need for the government to continue its work with other ethnic minorities toward a permanent peace agreement that calls for political settlements in order to end a conflict as old as the modern Burmese State itself. Then there is the need for a constitutional reform to enhance civilian control of the military, along with more progress on efforts to protect liberties, such as freedom of the press, freedom of ex-

pression, freedom of conscience, and freedom of assembly.

Those are just a few of the challenges facing Burma in 2015. But it is also true that Burma has come a long way from where it was just a few years ago. Reform has been offered, change has occurred, and considering the conditions within Burma when reform began, this is no small achievement. That is why there are opportunities as well.

The parliamentary election that will be held later this year represents a clear opportunity to demonstrate how far Burma has progressed. There are some encouraging signs that the election will be more credible, more inclusive, and more transparent than what we have seen in the past in that country. Unlike recent Burmese elections, international election monitors have been permitted to observe. By and large, the work of the Union Election Commission has been encouraging thus far, especially as it relates to serious efforts to modernize the voter roles and to make it easier to run for office. And our Embassy, under the capable leadership of Ambassador Derek Mitchell, has been engaged in the process as well.

These are all positive signs, but it is going to take a sustained commitment by President Thein Sein's government to ensure that as free and fair an election as possible takes place this fall because for all of the positive change we have seen in recent years, it is obvious that Burma still has much further to go. There are signs that its political reform effort has begun to falter, which is worrying for all of us who care about the Burmese people.

It doesn't mean Burmese officials can't turn things around. I believe they can, which is what I indicated to the speaker when I met with him. I believe there is still time before the next critical test of Burma's slow democratic development this autumn.

There may still be time to amend the Constitution, for instance, to ensure that it promotes rather than inhibits Burma's democratic development. It is hard to claim democratic legitimacy with a Constitution that unreasonably limits who can run for President or that effectively locks in a parliamentary veto for the military.

At the very least, the six-party talks we have seen between President Thein Sein, Shwe Mann, opposition leader Daw Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the military, ethnic groups, and others certainly represent progress. They should continue in a sustained fashion.

I also hope to see further progress on the draft national ceasefire reached between the Burmese Government and representatives from 16 ethnic groups in March.

Those of us who follow Burma want the country to succeed. We want it to succeed in carrying out a transparent, inclusive, and credible election on a broad scale. We know this standard goes far beyond simply holding an election without mass casualties or vio-

lence. It needs to be more than just holding an election without mass casualties or violence. It means the lead-up to the election must be transparent, inclusive, and credible, too. It means there should not be political favoritism shown by the state or its media organs. It means freedom of expression of the press and a peaceful assembly must be ensured. It means citizens must be allowed to register and to vote without harassment, and it means they must be granted equal opportunities to organize, to campaign, and to participate fully in the electoral process without fear and violence.

These basic standards of fairness are minimum goals Burmese officials must strive toward. If the Burmese Government gets this right, if it ensures a transparent, inclusive, and credible election, with results accepted by competing parties, that would go a long way toward reassuring Burma's friends around the globe that it remains committed to political reform. But if we end up with an election not accepted by the Burmese people as reflecting their will, it will make further normalization of relations—at least as it concerns the legislative branch of our government—much more difficult.

For example, such an outcome would likely hinder further enhancement of U.S.-Burma economic ties and military-to-military relations. Further, an erosion of congressional confidence in Burma's reform efforts would also make it more difficult for the executive branch to include Burma in the Generalized System of Preferences program or to enhance political military relations.

So these are some of the most pressing challenges and opportunities awaiting Burma in 2015. I noted many of them in my discussion with Burma's parliamentary speaker.

I would close by making it clear that we in the United States will be watching intently to see what happens in Burma in the coming months, and we are prepared to continue doing what we can to encourage more positive change in that country.

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#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

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#### BURMA

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have watched over the last decade Senator MCCONNELL focusing attention on Burma. It is remarkable the good he has done for that country. His vigilance in watching literally every move that government has made has been good for that country and I think good for the world, and I admire and appreciate the work he has done. There has not been a watchdog over any country that I am aware of who has been more intense than the senior Senator from Kentucky, keeping an eye on what goes

on in Burma. I appreciate his remarks today in that regard.

#### AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, my friend the Republican leader can't see the forest for the trees when it comes to health care. I understand that. He has given many speeches denigrating ObamaCare.

The facts are that more people are getting access to health care today under the Affordable Care Act than ever before. The share without insurance is now at an alltime low.

The cost growth in health care has never been lower than it has been since ObamaCare kicked in. I was telling one of my Senator friends yesterday that when I went home during the Memorial Day recess, I had two people come to me. I know that is not a great sampling, but it shows how impactful the legislation has been. Both of them had children with significant challenges, physical and mental. These young men and women now have the ability to get health care. They cannot be denied insurance because of their preexisting disability. This law that was passed not only applies to people with disabilities about which I have just spoken, but it applies to people with disabilities such as diabetes. Prior to ObamaCare, women could be charged more for their health care. So people are extremely satisfied with health care.

The Supreme Court should understand that about 7 million people who are happy with their health care and who are receiving subsidies for their insurance to take care of themselves would lose that. They would lose those subsidies. It would be a devastating blow to 7 million people, as well as to the economy. Also, those people who don't need subsidies benefit significantly. The people who have had increased premiums—my friend was very selective in whom he chose, because the people having increases are very minimal. I will have more to say about that at some subsequent time in the near future.

ObamaCare is working. Reports out this week show that all the targets have been met as to people who have purchased insurance and they are paying their premiums. So I think we should try to improve the law rather than my Republican friends continually trying to talk about the failures that don't exist.

#### SEQUESTRATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, every Senator wants to keep America safe, and that is why every Senator should be concerned about a particular threat to our national security. This threat to our national security is called sequestration. Sequestration puts in place drastic cuts to all funding, defense and nondefense.

The Defense authorization bill that is before us today doesn't fix that—and

that is a gross understatement. We should not start spending until we develop a bipartisan budget that does. That is the only responsible way to protect both our national security and America's middle class.

Sequestration results from what happened 4 years ago with another threat of a government shutdown because the Republicans couldn't get their financial house in order.

The Budget Control Act of 2011 passed. That act included a number of significant spending cuts and established a supercommittee led by Senator MURRAY and Congressman HENSARLING from Texas to produce a balanced, bipartisan agreement for additional deficit reduction. Unfortunately, Republicans could never agree. There was a lot of this: Yes, we are almost there, we are almost there. But they could never pull the trigger and agree. There was a refusal to close a single tax loophole to reduce the deficit; not a single one could they agree on.

So the supercommittee failed to reach an agreement, and the Budget Control Act triggered deep, automatic cuts.

Sequestration was never intended to happen. The point was to threaten cuts so deep and so stupid that Congress would never let them happen. But never put that beyond this Republican group over the last 10 years and who are still here in Congress. They allowed this stupid thing to happen. The cuts affected both defense and nondefense programs so everyone would feel compelled to move it, because the cuts were equal.

Unfortunately, what was stupid in 2011 is now official Republican policy. Congressional Republicans incorporated sequestration into their recent budget resolution. That resolution leaves sequestration cuts in place in parts of the budget that affect the middle class, and it also directly threatens national security. There are many examples of this.

How does it affect the middle class? The list is really endless. It cuts investments in roads, bridges, rail, and transit. That costs jobs—lots and lots of jobs, hundreds of thousands of jobs. It puts travelers at risk, and it weakens our economy.

Sequestration cuts education. That means fewer children with a shot at going to school. If they can't do that, they don't have a shot at success. It means fewer Americans who can afford college. That is the way it is. It means less economic opportunity for millions of Americans.

Sequestration cuts research. That means fewer chances to beat cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's. As a result of sequestration, the National Institutes of Health, the premier medical research institution in the world, was whacked by sequestration to the tune of \$1.6 billion. They have never, ever gotten that money back. It stopped the finalization work done on the universal flu vaccine. The list is endless as to

what they can't do because of that money being lost.

While sequestration is a dagger pointed at the middle class, it also represents a threat to our society in many different ways. It means fewer opportunities for American businesses and consumers to benefit from cutting edge innovations.

Sequestration threatens cuts to the FBI, the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It means fewer FBI resources devoted to terrorists and hunting them down.

Sequestration threatens cuts for the Transportation Security Administration, which helps protect us from another 9/11.

Sequestration threatens cuts for fusion centers, which have worked so well—these centers help law enforcement officials work together—and for the Coast Guard and border security officials who protect Americans from dangers from abroad.

These are cuts that are in place right now.

The bill before us is designed to provide an end run around sequestration for the Department of Defense by exploiting a provision that exempts from spending caps what is called the overseas contingency operations, or OCO. We all know that OCO was put in the budget many years ago, and it was set there so we would have the money to fight wars. It is always very hard to determine how much wars are going to cost. We know that because we had to borrow almost \$2 trillion for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially in Iraq.

But the OCO gimmick does not solve the problem of sequestration, and that is true. I am disappointed that even Senators who long have had a reputation for fiscal honesty, such as the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, my friend, are turning a blind eye to the OCO gimmick. There has not been a word from people who have had a reputation for fiscal honesty—not a word—about this gimmick.

The Department of Defense says it won't work. It is just a 1-year gimmick, and that will make it impossible for military leaders to prepare for threats we face in the future.

The OCO gimmick does nothing for agencies that protect us here at home, such as, as I have indicated, the FBI and even the Department of Homeland Security. That leaves all Americans vulnerable to attacks if they don't get the resources they need.

So until we reach a balanced, bipartisan agreement on the budget—an agreement that protects both national security and the middle class—not a single spending bill will become law. If any bill reaches the President, he will veto it. He has said so publicly many times. He should. It is critical for the middle class, and it is the only way to be fiscally responsible. We ought to budget before we spend.

Days after letting critical national security tools expire on their watch,