

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Bernhardt nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of David Bernhardt, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, July 24 marks a significant milestone in the history of my home State of Utah. On this day, 170 years ago, Brigham Young and the Mormon pioneers first entered the Salt Lake Valley. Facing violence and discrimination at every turn, Utah's early settlers crossed the Nation in search of a land where they could practice their religion free from prejudice and abuse. In the cradle of the Rocky Mountains, they found a home.

Each year, we remember the sacrifice of these courageous men and women and the miraculous events that led to the founding of our State by observing Pioneer Day. This special holiday is a celebration of the pioneer spirit, that unique mix of industry, ingenuity, and innovation that transformed an arid desert plain into one of the most prosperous States in the Nation.

Pioneer Day is a perennial reminder of how a people—left to their own devices and empowered to follow their dreams—can accomplish incredible things. It is a testament to what westerners can achieve when the government steps out of the way and allows the human spirit to flourish.

It seems only fitting then that on Pioneer Day I speak in support of David Bernhardt, a man who immediately understands the western way of life and has dedicated his career to defending it.

As my colleagues know, Mr. Bernhardt has been nominated to serve as the next Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior. Today, I wish to express my support for his confirmation in the strongest possible terms.

Mr. Bernhardt has a distinguished record of public service, having served for nearly 10 years in the Department of Interior as Solicitor, Deputy Solicitor, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Director of Congressional Affairs. Now that Mr. Bernhardt works in private practice, Mr. Bernhardt is regarded as one of the Nation's most experienced and authoritative legal minds on natural resource policy.

Broad support for Mr. Bernhardt's confirmation is a testament to the sterling reputation he has built over an accomplished career in both the public and private sectors. State wildlife management agencies, Native American Tribes, environmental conservation and wildlife protection groups, and the Congressional Western Caucus are

among the many organizations that have strongly endorsed Mr. Bernhardt's nomination. He has also garnered the support of hundreds of recreationists, sportsmen, anglers, agricultural producers, and ranchers.

Nominating Mr. Bernhardt is in keeping with the President's promise to restore trust between westerners and the Federal Government. After just 6 months in office, our President has already made tremendous progress in repairing the broken relationship between local communities and the executive branch.

Of course, significant challenges remain, especially in my home State of Utah, where reduced access to Federal land has hurt the rural economy. Fortunately, as a former Interior Solicitor, Mr. Bernhardt has the legal and political background necessary to tackle some of the greatest challenges facing Utah and the West. He is well-equipped to improve sage grouse management practices, streamline permitting on Federal lands, and increase recreational access.

Mr. Bernhardt is also committed to fostering cooperation between Interior agencies and State and Tribal governments, in addition to reducing the National Park Service's backlog. Reducing the maintenance backlog is critical to tourism in Utah, which is home to the Mighty 5 national parks.

I applaud the nomination of Mr. Bernhardt. His breadth of experience makes him uniquely qualified to serve as Deputy Secretary, and I look forward to working with him and Secretary Zinke to further the important work of the Department of the Interior.

In that regard, I also praise Secretary Zinke, who, I think, is doing a terrific job in that Department, understanding the needs of the West, especially the needs of all those areas that we know are supervised by the Interior Department. He is a terrific human being, and I have a great deal of respect for him. The reason he is so good is because he has had all the experience working in the West and living in the West and doing the things that really have made the West a great place to begin with.

Mr. Bernhardt is going to be a great addition to our government, and I want to applaud Secretary Zinke for helping to push him forward.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, as soon as tomorrow, we could be voting on a motion to proceed to the Repub-

lican healthcare plan. What that plan is, I am not sure anybody really knows. My friend the majority whip, when reporters asked him if his own Members would know what they would be voting on, said: "That's a luxury we don't have."

We have been on the topic of healthcare for 7 months. Republicans have been talking about repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act for over 7 years. Yet here we are, 1 or 2 days from a vote on the motion to proceed, and we don't even know what the Republicans plan is to vote on. We are potentially 1 or 2 days away from a vote on a bill that would reorganize one-sixth of the American economy and impacts tens of millions of American lives, and no one knows what it is. It is sort of like "Alice in Wonderland" around here. It comes down to this bizarre game where the Republican leader has basically said: Let's spin a wheel and see what we are going to vote on. This is no way to treat a matter as serious as healthcare—so near and dear to the lives of so many Americans.

I don't know how a single one of my Republican friends can in good conscience vote to proceed to a truncated debate on something as important as healthcare without knowing what bill they will ultimately be voting on. Isn't this the same party that shouted "Read the bill, read the bill" from the rafters when the Affordable Care Act was debated? It is completely bewildering.

Maybe we will be voting on the Republican repeal-and-replace bill, which will cause costs to go up and care to go down, which will cause 22 million Americans to lose their insurance, and which will so cruelly exchange healthcare for millions of working Americans for another tax break for the wealthy and the special interests. Maybe we will be voting on repeal without replace, which is even worse, which will cause our healthcare system to implode, creating chaos for 32 million Americans who would lose their insurance and chaos for millions more who would see their coverage diminish or their premiums rise. No one knows what we will be voting on. We know one thing: All the options are bad.

There is no good way out of this. The truth is, the Republicans are completely stuck when it comes to healthcare. Every single version of their repeal-and-replace bill is rotten at the core. Repeal without replace is even worse. The American people don't want tax breaks for the wealthy or the slashing of Medicaid. They don't want to repeal all the progress we made in healthcare without any plan to put in its place.

It is time to start over. It is time to go back to the drawing board—abandon tax cuts for the wealthy, abandon cuts to Medicaid, abandon repeal and run—and come together, both parties, around a set of nonideological proposals to improve our healthcare system. That is what we Democrats want to do.

I have called several Republicans. Some in their leadership are saying: Leader SCHUMER doesn't want people to talk to each other and won't let that happen if the bill fails. Well, first, I couldn't prevent it if I wanted to, and second, I don't want to. I want us to sit down and come up with ways to improve ACA. No one said it is perfect.

So if the bill fails tomorrow, we will start right away trying to work with our Republican colleagues to stabilize the marketplace and improve the cost and quality of healthcare. Whether they join us in that effort is entirely up to them.

ECONOMIC POLICIES TO HELP AMERICAN FAMILIES

Madam President, on another matter, today in Berryville, VA, the Democratic Party began presenting our vision for the future of the country. As I have traveled New York State, from upstate, rural, Republican areas, like Sodus Bay, where I was Friday, to suburban Long Island, to the inner-city Bronx, I have found one thing in common: Average families feel they have been pushed around by large economic forces, and they are losing that traditional, American faith in the future. Too many families in America feel as though rules of the economy are rigged against them. They feel as if they are getting a raw deal. And they are right. American families deserve a better deal so this country works for everyone, not just the elites and special interests. Today, Democrats started presenting that better deal to the American people.

There used to be a basic bargain in this country that if you worked hard and played by the rules, you could own a home, afford a car, put your kids through college, and take a modest vacation every year, while putting enough away for a comfortable retirement. I should know. I grew up in that America. My father was an exterminator, and he worked very hard but managed to—not making a whole lot of money—build a good life for his family. But things have changed.

Today's working Americans are justified in having greater doubts about the future than almost any generation since the Depression. Corporate interests and the superwealthy are allowed to spend unlimited, undisclosed money on campaigns and lobbying so they can protect their special deals in Washington. And for too long—far too long—government has played along, tilting the economic field in favor of the wealthy and the powerful, taking the burden off them and putting it on the backs of hard-working Americans. The result is an economy that has created enormous wealth at the top, while producing less work and less pay for average Americans. Incomes and wages have flatlined while everyday costs are skyrocketing.

Democrats, frankly, have too often hesitated from directly and unflinchingly taking on the misguided policies that got us here—so much so that

Americans don't know what we stand for. Well, not after today. Democrats are showing the country that we are the party on the side of working people and that we stand for three things: First, we are going to increase people's pay; second, we are going to reduce their everyday expenses; and third, we are going to provide workers the tools they need for the 21st-century economy.

Today we announced three new policies to advance these goals.

Right now, there is nothing to stop vulture capitalists from egregiously raising the price of lifesaving drugs without justification. We are going to fight for rules to stop prescription drug price gouging and demand that drug companies justify price increases to the public. And we are going to push for empowering Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices for seniors.

Right now, our antitrust laws are designed to allow huge corporations to merge, padding the pockets of investors but sending costs skyrocketing for everything from cable bills and airline tickets to beer, food, and healthcare. We are going to fight to allow regulators to penalize big companies if they are hurting consumers and to make it harder for companies to merge if it reduces competition.

Right now, millions of unemployed or underemployed people—particularly those without a college degree—could be brought back into the labor force and retrained to secure full-time, higher paying work. We propose giving employers—particularly small businesses—a large tax credit to train workers for unfilled jobs, with a requirement to hire that worker at a good wage once the training is complete.

In future weeks, we will offer additional ideas, from rebuilding rural America to fundamentally changing our trade laws to benefit workers, not multinational corporations. Now, we are in the minority in both Houses of Congress. We know that. We cannot delude anyone that this Congress will begin passing our priorities tomorrow, but this is the start of a new vision for our party. This set of economic policies will form the backbone of our agenda, and we welcome our Republican colleagues to join with us in any of these ideas they might find acceptable.

"A better deal" is not just a slogan; it is a mission. It is about reorienting government to work on behalf of people and families. It is not going to be the work of only one Congress. It shouldn't be the work of one party. As I said, we welcome any Republicans willing to work with us on these issues because there is an American imperative and a moral imperative to do what we are doing here.

If that torch, held by the lady in the harbor of the city in which I live—that symbol of optimism and hope for the future—starts flickering, it is a different America, an America no one will like.

American families deserve a better deal, a government that has their back and helps make the economy work for them. That is how we will restore the fundamental optimism that defines the American spirit.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, first, let me thank the Democratic leader for his statement on a better deal for all Americans.

I had a chance over the weekend to travel throughout my State, and I heard over and over again the people of Maryland talking about what we need to do on a better deal. I had an interesting forum on healthcare, and Marylanders want a better deal on healthcare. They want to make sure healthcare is affordable, that they can get access to quality care, and they can make sure we maintain the highest quality healthcare.

What they don't want to see is us moving in the wrong direction. I heard over and over again their concerns about what is happening with the consideration of the bill the Republican leadership is anticipating having a vote on later this week. That bill would proceed on legislation that would eliminate healthcare coverage for, at least, 22 million Americans, maybe as high as 33 million Americans. I must tell you that is not a better deal for Americans on their healthcare needs. We could do much better moving in the opposite direction and making healthcare more affordable, not cutting people out of healthcare insurance.

In my State of Maryland, in 2018 alone, 221,000 people in my State would lose coverage under the proposals the Republican leadership is suggesting, including 4,200 veterans, 164,000 people in the Medicaid system, and 62,000 people in the individual marketplace. That is going to hurt. These are people today who have healthcare coverage who would lose their healthcare coverage. It would hurt our seniors in the coverage they get under the Medicaid system for long-term care. It would hurt those who are working to try to end this opioid drug addiction issue.

Under the current law, mental health, behavioral health, and drug addiction is covered under the essential health benefits. It is covered under private insurance. It is covered under the Medicaid system. That is in danger of being lost under the legislation being considered.

I heard from public health and law enforcement over the weekend how that would move our community in the wrong direction if those bills were considered.

I also heard from the majority leader that all he wants to do is get on this bill, and then we can offer amendments. Well, that is not accurate. You can't offer any amendments you want on a bill that is under reconciliation instructions, and we certainly aren't

going to get a fair shot at trying to make this bill a better bill under the restrictions we are operating under: We had no committee hearings. We had no committee markups. That is not the way legislation should be considered.

The other issue I heard about from people in Maryland—I think you will hear this from people around the country—is they want to bring down the cost of their healthcare coverage. They want to bring down the cost of their healthcare. They want to reduce the high growth rate in healthcare costs in this country. Yet the Senate Republican bill increases the average premium by as much as \$1,700 in Maryland by 2020 and preserves what we call the age tax—a 5-to-1 difference.

So if you happen to be 55 years of age, you are going to pay a lot more than that in increases in your health insurance premiums. That is not what people in Maryland want to see. That is not what people in this country want to see. They are concerned that we should be building on the Affordable Care Act to bring down the cost of their premium increases, not to increase it by that dramatic amount of money.

The increase in deductibles in Maryland could be as high as \$3,300 for a person making \$42,000 per year and \$5,600 for a person making about \$18,000 a year. Those are increases in deductibles. They can't afford that. The concerns we have—people like the Affordable Care Act, and they want us to improve it. They want us to improve it. They don't want us to add to their costs, and the bill the majority leader is asking us to consider would have people in Maryland and around the country paying more—not less, which they want.

The people in Maryland and around this country like the consumer protections we have under the Affordable Care Act. They like the idea that there is no annual cap or lifetime cap. I had several people who came up to me to tell me about their own personal circumstances. One father explained to me that his child was born with serious issues and that they reached their cap within a matter of months. Without the protection in the Affordable Care Act, they would have had no other insurance coverage. Yet, under the bill being considered by the Republican leadership, that family could lose that protection because you could see the imposition of caps.

All of us know of people who are very concerned about preexisting conditions. The bill that is being considered under the Republican leadership weakens those protections against discrimination of preexisting conditions.

Let me just remind my colleagues of what we saw before the Affordable Care Act in discriminatory practices by private insurance companies. We had reined much of that in under the Affordable Care Act. All of that could be lost if we proceed on legislation—and move it forward—that doesn't provide

the consumer protections, allows the elimination of caps, allows discriminatory practices in regard to preexisting conditions, restricts the amount of money going into the Medicaid system so our States are forced basically to cut back on the Medicaid system. We lose the expanded coverage—the Congressional Budget Office has already told us that—and we go back to the days of job lock. I want to talk about that for one moment because I think this is one of the untold stories. We haven't had a lot of discussion on the floor.

If you go in the wrong direction and you do what the Republican leadership is talking about doing and repeal the Affordable Care Act and either repeal and later replace or replace it now with a program that will eliminate a lot of coverage and once again eliminate these consumer protections we have in health insurance, what you do is people get locked into employment. They are afraid to leave their job because they have insurance that covers their family—they have a spouse with cancer or they have a child with a major disability. Yes, they would like to do what this country is best known for, and that is set out with an entrepreneurial spirit, start a company or go and take risks, but they can't do it because they know they are jeopardizing their family's healthcare because they can't get the type of insurance they need to cover their risks. That is called job lock and that works against the growth of our economy.

There are so many reasons to be concerned about what the majority leader is asking us to do—to proceed on this bill that all the options we have seen will cost tens of millions of people their coverage, take away a lot of the consumer protections we have seen in the law, and discriminate against our elderly, discriminate against minorities and women. That would be returning to our old healthcare system. No, that is not the right way to do it.

I am frequently asked: Well, what should we do? The Affordable Care Act, doesn't it have problems? Doesn't it need to be fixed?

The Affordable Care Act has done a lot of good. It has given people coverage who never had coverage before. It has reined in the discriminatory practices of health insurance companies. It has made a dramatic improvement on dealing with minority health and health disparities. It has provided essential health benefits so we deal with mental health and addiction. It has done a lot of really good things, but, yes, we could improve it. There has never been a major law passed without us going back and revisiting.

Why haven't Democrats been part of this process? Well, we could not get engaged in this process because the way this bill came to the floor, it didn't come through the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, it didn't come in through the Finance Committee, the two committees of ju-

risdiction that deal with the healthcare system in this country. Instead, it came in through the majority leader using the rule XIV process to bring out a reconciliation bill that can be jammed through, with limited time and no open amendment process, from the point of view that amendments have to be germane to the reconciliation instructions so we don't have an opportunity to fix this bill.

We weren't part of the process to develop the bill. You are not giving an opportunity for the democratic system to work. There was no on-ramp for Democrats to get engaged in the process.

About 2 weeks ago—maybe 3 weeks ago now—I filed legislation and sent letters to my Republican colleagues telling them: I want to work with you. I do. I have worked with Republicans in the Finance Committee on healthcare bills. We have gotten some good things done. Democrats and Republicans want to work together, so let's work together.

The legislation I filed dealt with the two major problems that I hear about, as I travel throughout Maryland, regarding what we need to fix on the Affordable Care Act and how we can make it better.

Problem No. 1, we need more stability and competition within the individual marketplace. Yes, we have seen large proposed increases in premiums in the individual marketplace—not in the group plans where most Americans have their insurance but in the individual marketplace. Why? Because we don't have enough people who have signed up in the exchanges. Younger, healthier people, because there really hasn't been a penalty imposed, have chosen not to join. They will say: Look, we will join if we have a need.

We have also found that with President Trump indicating he may not fund the cost-sharing provisions that go directly to the insurance carriers that keep the premiums low and the deductibles and copays low, this also has a lot of insurance companies nervous. As a result, the premium increases are larger than what we had anticipated. We need to do something about it.

How can we keep those premium increases at a more reasonable growth rate rather than what we have seen? One way we could do it is a proposal that, I believe, has bipartisan support; that is, deal with what is known as reinsurance. Reinsurance is a way we spread the risk over a greater group of people, therefore dealing with those high-risk pools in a way in which their premium costs are much more affordable.

Another way we can do it is by Congress mandating that the President fund the cost-sharing with the insurance carriers so we don't have the threat that they are going to pull out those funds that are used to keep copays and deductibles low.

Another way we can do it is to increase our support for those who are of

modest income and the funds they have to lay out for their premiums because we know you can make a good salary, but because of the cost of healthcare, if you don't have an employer providing part of those benefits, it is very hard for you to be able to afford that without some help. We can do all of that.

Another thing we could do is bring more competition into the individual marketplace. We have had those who have suggested a Medicare for all. We have had those who have suggested Medicare for the near elderly—the 55 to 65 age group or something similar to that. We have others who have suggested that we have a public option under the exchanges. All those, to me, make sense because it just brings in more competition. There is no additional government cost here because they are not subsidized any differently than any other insurance plan, but it gives more options, more choice, more competition, and therefore more stability in the individual marketplace. We could do all that and all that can help.

The other thing we really need to deal with is to deal with the overall cost of healthcare. Here, again, Democrats and Republicans have had ideas. Why don't we take on the pharmaceutical industry? Why do Americans pay twice what Canadians pay for the same medicines that are manufactured here in the United States? Why don't we have rebates in the Medicare system like the rebates we have in the Medicaid system? Why don't we organize our purchasing power in a larger pool so we can get greater discounts for the government taxpayers? All those things will bring down the cost of prescription medicines. The President has talked about it. Democrats and Republicans have talked about it. It is time we act.

We have acted in several areas to try to deal with more value-based reimbursements in our healthcare system, recognizing we should treat the person, not the particular disease. Many people have more than one ailment, and they have to go back to the doctor multiple times. Why don't we have a more coordinated, integrated care model?

I talked on the floor about 2 weeks ago about the coordinated care model between Sheppard Pratt Hospital in Baltimore and Mosaic, which deals with behavioral health issues and how they deal with it in an integrated, coordinated care model, which saves money. It saves money. There are fewer tests, more timely interventions.

How can we use telemedicine? They are using telepsychiatry. How can we use that to bring down the cost of care? When I am asked in my district, asked in my State as to what I can do—where is my plan, and how can we fix the Affordable Care Act—my answer is quite simple: I am proud of the progress we have made under the Affordable Care Act. I invite Democrats and Republicans through our committees to work together to improve it. Yes, we can im-

prove it. We can provide more stability in the individual marketplace. We can bring down the high annual growth we have seen in premiums in the individual marketplace. We can continue to bring down the growth rate of healthcare costs by working together on some of these commonsense approaches in order to deal with healthcare in America. All of this I think we can do, with Democrats and Republicans working together. But the first order of business—and I urge my colleagues—the first order of business is to stop this process of trying to jam a repeal of the Affordable Care Act and a replacement that would cost tens of millions of people in this country their health coverage and would move in the wrong direction on how we should improve healthcare in America. Let's get that off the table.

Let's reject this motion to proceed that the majority leader is talking about voting on later this week. Let's do what Senator ALEXANDER, the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee has suggested. Let's have hearings in our committees. Let's work together, and let's bring legislation that stabilizes the Affordable Care Act and deals with the two major problems that the people in this country are talking about; that is, bringing down the growth rate of premium costs and bringing down the overall growth rate of healthcare costs in America. I believe we can do both by working together. There are suggestions I have made, and I am sure other Members have. Let's work on those. Let's work together and get it done. Let's do what is in the best interest of the people in this country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

MONTANA WILDFIRES

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, it has been a long, hot, dry summer in Montana. That is why I rise today to honor the brave men and women in Montana who are fighting wildfires throughout our great State, the families who are facing devastating losses due to drought and fire, and to call on Congress to do their job and help these folks.

Due to the drought and high temperatures, Montana has turned into a tinderbox. Unfortunately, fires have sparked all across our State, some 24 of them—which changes by the hour, I might add. Across Montana, over one-quarter million acres have already burned, and many of these fires continue to rage. Montana is burning, and our heroic firefighters are protecting lives, our lands, our homes, our way of life.

HONORING TRENTON JOHNSON

Madam President, I would be remiss if I didn't mention one firefighter in particular, Missoula's Trenton Johnson. Trenton lost his life last week while he was on the fire line. Trenton's bravery and sacrifice will not be forgotten.

LOGEPOLE COMPLEX FIRE

Madam President, communities across the State are coming together to protect their homes and livelihoods, and families are concerned about their homes, property, and health. The largest fire is the Lodgepole Complex fire in Garfield County. This afternoon, 30-mile-per-hour winds ballooned the Lodgepole Complex to more than 230,000 acres. Over the weekend, the fire jumped the highway, and as of today it is nowhere near containment.

The Lodgepole Complex fire is made up of three different fires that have turned Eastern Montana's farm and grazing land into an ashtray, leaving an unknown number of farms and ranches with an uncertain future, forcing families to evacuate and communities to join local fire departments, with anyone willing and able to join in the firefight.

Sadly, Montana is used to this. Fire season has been as common as the autumn and the spring. As I stand here, nearly two dozen uncontained, large fires are raging in Montana. It has taken more and more resources to fight fires, and these resources are becoming more and more difficult to come by.

Places like Garfield County are being forced to ask for donations to get volunteer firefighters the fuel they need to save lives and protect property, and this is unacceptable. Protecting our communities from disaster and coming to help our fellow Americans in their time of need is a fundamental pillar of government.

I was pleased to see Governor Bullock declare Montana a fire emergency, which will go a long way to bring much needed resources into our State. Last night, the regional director of FEMA denied emergency assistance for the Lodgepole fire, so this afternoon, I called Administrator Brock Long of FEMA to make sure he heard from me about the situation on the ground and asked him to cut loose much needed relief into Montana.

Firefighters from all levels of government have bravely fought fires across our State. Folks across Federal, State, and local agencies have been working around-the-clock to contain the havoc. Montana's communities are strong, tight-knit, and they always persevere, but they expect the government to have their backs. Congress can assist these communities by changing the way we fund fighting wildland fires. Fires are a devastating natural disaster and should be treated that way. We need to raise the disaster cap so that we can budget for the real cost of fighting fires, making sure the folks on the ground have the resources they need to keep our communities safe.

As an example, Forest Service resources are already stretched thin. When a fire starts, they are forced to take money they use for managing the forest and use that for fighting fires. Twenty years ago, firefighting took up about 20 percent of the Forest Service budget. In 2016, more than half of the

Forest Service budget was spent on fighting fires. This is not sustainable.

When Montana's communities are burning, I don't want a bureaucrat in Washington, DC, weighing the pros and cons of sending help to these communities. We want the fire to be contained. As Montana burns, Congress cannot afford to wait. We need to act and allow catastrophic wildfires to be treated as what they are—natural disasters. It is the least we can do for the rancher in Jordan who lost his cattle, the rancher in Sand Springs who no longer has a fence around his pasture, or any Montanan who is forced to leave the home they have known because a fire may be descending upon them.

Fire season is always a testament to the strength of Montana's communities. Everyone works together, they put aside their differences, and they play their part to achieve a common goal. Neighbors open their homes to displaced families; churches and community centers turn into places to get food and other essentials. Congress can learn a thing or two from these Montana communities. These communities and firefighters work around-the-clock. Now is the time for Congress to help out. We can do that by fixing how we fund firefighting.

In the meantime, I hope you all will join Sharla and me in sending thoughts and prayers to all the Montanans who have been changed by wildfire. Our thoughts and prayers are with those heroes on the frontlines.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

HEALTHCARE

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, it is unconscionable that the U.S. Senate will soon be voting on a measure that would force between 22 and 32 million people to lose their health insurance. This vote is particularly unconscionable when you consider that each Member of this Chamber has high quality health insurance that will be there whenever we need it—and we all will, as I recently found out.

I know as well as anyone that we are all one diagnosis away from a serious illness. When I was diagnosed with kidney cancer not too long ago, I had the peace of mind of knowing that I was covered and that insurance would make the cost of treating my illness more manageable. Many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle have found comfort in having high quality health insurance as they confront serious illnesses and injuries of their own.

Every American deserves that same peace of mind. That is why I am fighting for universal healthcare that is a right for every American, not a privi-

lege reserved only for those who can afford it. This is something we can and should be working on in a bipartisan fashion. There are a lot of great ideas we could be debating and considering to move us toward this bipartisan goal.

Instead, the majority leader and his allies are forcing a vote on TrumpCare, a mean, ugly bill that will deprive tens of millions of people across our country of the healthcare they deserve.

Although some have argued over the past week that this vote is doomed to fail, we can't be complacent. We have to keep fighting because if TrumpCare becomes the law of the land, it would be devastating for tens of millions of people across the country, harming the poorest, sickest, and oldest members of our society. It would undermine protections for Americans living with serious and chronic conditions, who could face a reimposition of yearly and lifetime caps on their care. It would impose an age tax on people 50 to 64 years old, which would allow insurance companies to charge them up to five times more for insurance because of their age. I could go on.

For hundreds of thousands of people in Hawaii and tens of millions more across the country, TrumpCare is not an abstract proposal that would have no relevance to their lives. I have heard literally from tens of thousands of people from across Hawaii about the devastating consequences TrumpCare would have on their lives. Hawaii is a small State. To think that literally over 20,000 people in Hawaii have contacted my office to tell me the devastation that TrumpCare will bring to their lives—this is because insurance is personal. They have spoken out against this bill loudly and clearly because healthcare is personal.

Keith Moniz from Maui has a particularly compelling story to tell. Keith's brother, Lester, after working as a custodian for more than 40 years at St. Anthony School, lost his job and his health insurance. Only a few short months later, Lester had a debilitating stroke that left him permanently disabled. Fortunately, Keith's brother was able to obtain Medicaid coverage and is now a long-term resident at Hale Makua Health Services on Maui, where nearly 80 percent of all patients and residents rely on Medicaid to pay for their necessary care.

Keith was very clear about what would happen if TrumpCare succeeded in making large cuts to Medicaid.

I quote Keith:

It would be devastating. We had a difficult time taking care of him—

His brother, Lester—

when he was at home, and he's gotten the care that he needs at Hale Makua. It would be a big loss . . . I don't know what we would do, where we would be able to move him to.

Alvin, another resident at Hale Makua, was paralyzed in a car accident in 2006. Alvin lived with his aunt and uncle for a short time after his accident, but the complexity of his care was too much for them to handle on

their own. Alvin has lived at Hale Makua for almost 11 years now. He gets daily physical therapy and receives the supportive, life-sustaining care he needs. He would not be able to afford to live at Hale Makua without support from Medicaid.

When asked, Alvin had a simple message for people in Washington, DC, who are trying to make huge cuts to Medicaid.

I quote Alvin:

I'm not a politician, but I know that these programs really help those who are in need. I really hope that they would take a longer look at it and realize that these are programs the elderly and disabled need.

People like Lester and Alvin are depending on us to keep up the fight against this mean, ugly bill until it is defeated for good. As we contemplate what is next, I hope we can come together across party lines to stabilize insurance markets and continue our work to provide universal healthcare for every American.

I should think that each and every one of us who represents some 800,000—well, our entire State. I used to be in the U.S. House. There, you have districts, and I represented about 800,000 people. Of course, as a Member of the Senate, I represent the whole State. I should think that all of us who represent literally the 300 or so million people all across our country would care about the healthcare of every single one of our constituents, and TrumpCare is not the way to ensure that.

The fight continues.

I yield the floor.

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. FLAKE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, it has been 2 months since Ambassador Lighthizer notified Congress of the administration's intent to enter into negotiations with Mexico and Canada on the North American Free Trade Agreement. During that time, I launched something called NAFTA 4 AZ, which is an initiative to allow Arizonans to share their stories about how NAFTA has changed their lives for the better.

I have heard from Arizonans across the State who work in a multitude of industries—from dairy farmers to call center employees—and the responses I have received are overwhelmingly positive. For example, Matt Mandel, who serves as chief operating officer for SunFed, a company based in Rio Rico, shared his personal story.

Matt wrote:

Fresh produce trade has kept my family working here in the State of Arizona for three generations. Arizona imports over 17

billion pounds of fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables—bilateral trade between the United States and Mexico representing over \$40 billion. Let's modernize NAFTA.

Mignonne Hollis with the Arizona Regional Economic Development Foundation tweeted:

NAFTA and our trade partners in Mexico have allowed us to grow the aerospace industry in southern Arizona, which is key to our economic development.

Dairy farmer Jim Boyle notes:

Most of our customers are local—right here in our State—but our biggest customer outside of Arizona is Mexico. We ship daily loads of cheese, powder, and tank loads of cream all the way through Mexico. Please, let's keep NAFTA working for the American farmer.

Other comments I have received through my website include statements like "I have enjoyed a constant supply of fresh fruits and vegetables in these years of NAFTA. I have also noticed . . . how relatively inexpensive many household items have been since" and "We supply parts that cross the border multiple times before they reach final assembly in the U.S. Free trade is vital to our success and the success of our customers who not only get us where we need to go but protect our shores and vital interests."

The Arizona Chamber of Commerce noted in its comments on NAFTA:

Agreement is central to the State's economic prosperity.

The NAFTA agreement, that is.

Mexico is Arizona's leading trade partner. Canada is the State's second leading trade partner.

In an interview focused on the NAFTA renegotiation process, the CEO of Arizona's Hispanic chamber stated: "We know that Mexican nationals spend over a billion dollars a year in just Pima County." That is just one county.

It is hardly surprising to hear such overwhelmingly positive support for NAFTA, considering the benefits it has had on Arizona's economy.

NAFTA 4 AZ has helped to put on paper what Arizonans know all too well: NAFTA plays a critical role in supporting jobs, opportunity, and economic growth. It has been great to hear from people all over the State talking about how NAFTA has helped them and asking the administration to modernize NAFTA, not to end it.

NAFTA 4 AZ submissions, as well as comments submitted to the USTR from Arizona stakeholders, share one common plea: Do not harm the trilateral structure and the reciprocal market access of NAFTA.

Earlier this week the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative made public its negotiating objectives for NAFTA. Based on what the USTR released, it appears the administration has recognized the importance of this central tenet of NAFTA. I am pleased that it appears that the administration will seek to modernize NAFTA along the well-worn lines of what was negotiated for the now defunct Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement.

I think we can all agree that addressing the issues of digital trade and intellectual property in the agreement, which is more than 20 years old, is the key to NAFTA's continued success. Let's modernize it, not end it.

However, these negotiating objectives mark the next step in a long process that will have tremendous impact on Arizona's economy, for better or for worse. Unfortunately, the path forward for NAFTA remains uncertain and there is a long road to travel before we get to a place where the United States, Mexico, and Canada can all agree to an updated NAFTA.

From the vegetable fields of Yuma to the warehouses in Nogales, to the small retailers along the southern border, to the hotels throughout the valley, to the ranches up north where I grew up in Snowflake, NAFTA is important to all Arizonans.

I will review the administration's objectives closely as I continue to talk to Arizonans about what they need to ensure vibrant cross-border trading.

I look forward to continued consultation between Congress and the administration as this process to modernize NAFTA moves forward.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have come to the floor to speak this evening in support of the confirmation of David Bernhardt to be Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior.

The Deputy Secretary is the department's COO, or chief operating officer. This is the individual who holds the position to really execute the strategy and oversee the initiatives that are undertaken by thousands of employees as they carry out their statutory duties and the administration's agenda. It is a very key position.

I believe very strongly that Secretary Zinke has chosen a strong individual for this position of Deputy Secretary. Mr. Bernhardt is a fellow westerner. He comes from the small town of Rifle, CO. He understands the management of Federal lands and how it affects those who live near them, the implications of Federal policies, and the need for balance between conservation and development.

David is an avid sportsman. He likes to hunt. He likes to fish. He likes to get outside and enjoy the outdoors.

Mr. Bernhardt also has extensive experience at the Department of the Interior. He previously spent several years as its solicitor, and this is a position for which he was confirmed by this Senate Chamber by voice vote. So he has gone through this process before and was endorsed strongly at the time.

Throughout his time at the Department of the Interior, Mr. Bernhardt gained expertise about a range of Alaska and western issues. He also has a strong reputation as a manager which, of course, is critical for a Deputy Secretary.

Mr. Bernhardt's nomination is supported by dozens of Members of this Chamber and by dozens of stakeholder groups. He has been endorsed by a broad coalition of sportsmen's groups as well, including Ducks Unlimited, the Safari Club, and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the National Water Resources Association, the National Farm Alliance, NCAI, or the National Conference of American Indians, and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe are just a few more that have weighed in favorably on his behalf.

Mr. Bernhardt also fared well throughout the confirmation process, proving again that he is a good choice for this role. We held a hearing on his nomination on May 18. We reported him favorably from the Energy and Natural Resources Committee with bipartisan support. We moved that out on June 4. So we have had about 6 weeks now where others have had an opportunity to review him and review his credentials. It is unfortunate that he has had to wait 6 weeks. I know that Secretary Zinke is anxious to put him to work. He is now ready this evening to be confirmed by the full Senate.

I would like to thank David Bernhardt for his willingness to return to Federal service. I think he will be a very capable second-in-command for Secretary Zinke, helping to steer the Department in a positive direction. Alaskans, especially this one, are looking forward to working with him.

I urge my colleagues to support Mr. Bernhardt's confirmation.

I yield the floor.

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. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to complete my remarks.

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

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, David Bernhardt is a well-qualified nominee to serve as our next Deputy Secretary of the Interior.

The Department of the Interior is charged with managing our wildlife, our public lands, including our national parks and refuges, and our Nation's rich natural resources, which are key to American energy independence. They are charged with the sacred responsibility of protecting the Federal Government's trust responsibility to Indian Tribes.

Managing the Department of the Interior is a complex balancing act. We need someone who is able to balance these competing interests, and we need someone who understands the importance of our public lands.

David Bernhardt has spent his life balancing competing interests, weighing the stewardship of our natural resources and wildlife with the letter of the law. His relationship to our lands and the western way of life is not second nature; it is first.

Mr. Bernhardt was confirmed unanimously by the Senate in 2006 as the Solicitor of the Department. As Solicitor he proved he was capable of upholding the law, even under difficult situations. My colleagues may remember that he wrote the opinion that decided to list the polar bear and drafted a workable rule. As we know, Secretary Salazar then upheld this rule.

As Solicitor, he prioritized establishing a robust ethics team at the Department. That ethics team still exists today.

Mr. Bernhardt has proven to have the highest level of integrity and work ethic. For heaven's sake, he is a westerner. He is from Rifle, CO, and the importance of our public lands and wildlife flows through his veins like a lot of us who live out West. I have confidence that he will be a dedicated servant to our western way of life, where we love to hunt, to fish, to hike on our public lands. I have confidence in this because I know he loves this way of life as well.

I am not the only one who has this confidence. Listen to this list of support from groups across our country that support his appointment: the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership; Ducks Unlimited; the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Boone and Crockett Club, and others that many Montanans are members of, including the Mule Deer Foundation, the NRA, and the National Shooting Sports Foundation.

While the U.S. Senate confirmed Ryan Zinke as Secretary of the Interior, he became the first Montanan, my friend Ryan Zinke, to serve on the President's Cabinet since our statehood in 1889. It sent a message that the Department of the Interior would have our Montana values and our western values, and the confirmation of David Bernhardt as Deputy Secretary would make good on that promise.

While Montanans and westerners highly value access to our public lands and wildlife, Montanans are also pleading—pleading—for our land management agencies to be better partners, to work alongside our States, and to work alongside our landowners.

Secretary Zinke needs a right-hand man to make sure we uphold our commitment to Indian Nations. Secretary Zinke promised to rebuild trust in our Federal land and wildlife management agencies and strengthen the government-to-government relationship with Indian Tribes. He needs a deputy in place who can help implement this vision to restore trust and balance to the Department of the Interior for Montanans.

My colleagues, it is time Secretary Zinke has a Deputy we can all count on, and I look forward to casting my vote for David Bernhardt.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, all postcloture time is expired. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Bernhardt nomination?

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea."

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 53, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 166 Ex.]

YEAS—53

Barrasso	Flake	Murkowski
Bennet	Gardner	Paul
Blunt	Graham	Perdue
Boozman	Grassley	Portman
Burr	Hatch	Risch
Cassidy	Heitkamp	Roberts
Cochran	Heller	Rounds
Collins	Hoeven	Rubio
Corker	Inhofe	Sasse
Cornyn	Isakson	Scott
Cotton	Johnson	Shelby
Crapo	Kennedy	Strange
Cruz	King	Sullivan
Daines	Lankford	Thune
Donnelly	Lee	Tillis
Enzi	Manchin	Wicker
Ernst	McConnell	Young
Fischer	Moran	

NAYS—43

Baldwin	Harris	Reed
Blumenthal	Hassan	Sanders
Booker	Heinrich	Schatz
Brown	Hirono	Schumer
Cantwell	Kaine	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Carper	Leahy	Tester
Casey	Markey	Udall
Coons	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Warner
Duckworth	Merkley	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murray	Wyden
Franken	Nelson	
Gillibrand	Peters	

NOT VOTING—4

Alexander	McCain
Capito	Toomey

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that with respect to the Bernhardt nomination the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session.

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 175, H.R. 2810.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 175, H.R. 2810, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2018 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

MONTANA WILDFIRES

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, as I speak, wildfires are blazing across Montana. In fact, as of this moment, we have 21 active fires, with just about 300,000 acres burned, which has turned our big sky into gray smoke. In fact, the Lodgepole fire in Eastern Montana alone has burned over 250,000 acres, and there are 300-plus heroes bravely working to tame those growing flames.

I was on the phone a couple of times with our county commissioner from Garfield County, and we talked about how to get more resources for these devastating fires. I just got word an hour ago that the Sunrise fire on the western side of our State, near Superior, MT, was just elevated in the last couple of hours as the No. 2 national priority fire in the Nation.

Montana is hot, Montana is dry, and there is a long way to go yet in this fire season. The status quo is simply unacceptable. With these fires blazing and the ground cracking beneath us, we are reminded of how fragile the way of life in Montana is.

Our No. 1 economic driver in Montana is agriculture. Montana ag supports our economy in seasons of plenty, as well as in seasons of drought, including physical drought and unseasonable rains. We have seen both in Montana, and farmers and ranchers have risen to the occasion each time. As they have supported us, we must support them.

The historic drought conditions in Eastern Montana warrant relief from regulations that limit the producers' abilities to use our land in the best ways possible. I was pleased by the decision of Secretary Perdue and the USDA to allow impacted producers to best use the Conservation Reserve Program acreage for grazing, but I believe Montana producers are not able to sleep at night for fear of losing their family farms. They deserve more support from those who benefit from their legacy of hard work.

I have held and will continue to hold USDA's feet to the fire, urging additional emergency relief for farmers and