

real problem is not that there is a difference of opinion between a House bill and a Senate bill on immigration that cannot be reconciled. The problem is there is no House bill.

We are happy to meet our colleagues in the House part of the way. We would love to sit down and negotiate, but there is no House bill. So the problem is not that the two sides are irreconcilable, it is that one side has refused to do anything. The problem is that House Republicans have completely abdicated their responsibility to address important issues such as fixing our broken immigration system.

For the last few weeks I have explained the reason the House has done nothing on immigration is because the House Republican leadership has handed the gavel of leadership on immigration to far-right extremists such as Congressman STEVE KING. He is truly extreme on this issue. STEVEN KING says to do nothing—absolutely nothing—and the House does nothing, absolutely nothing.

Well, not only has this point not been refuted by anyone in the Republican Party, it has actually been even further confirmed in the last few days.

Let's start with STEVE KING himself. Last week KING filed an amendment to the Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill that would require the Department of Justice to "investigate" the Department of Homeland Security's use of prosecutorial discretion toward certain immigrants, including beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or the DACA Program, that the Obama administration announced in June of 2012.

When discussing his amendment, STEVE KING—listen to this—pejoratively referred to the DACA Program as "Deferred Action for Criminal Aliens." That is what he thinks. He thinks that every immigrant is a criminal. When describing this program, STEVE KING said:

For everyone who's a valedictorian, there's another 100 out there who weigh 130 pounds—and they've got calves the size of cantaloupes because they have been hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the border.

Was KING criticized for these comments? Was he chastised and told he has no place in a modern Republican Party? Was KING's amendment at least ignored in the same way every other immigration bill has been ignored?

Unfortunately, the answer to all of these questions is no. For the second time in a year, the House Republican leadership actually rewarded KING and handed him the gavel yet again by giving him another vote on another politically motivated appropriations amendment. The amendment to investigate the DACA Program is what received a vote last week. Just as before, the House passed yet another inflammatory King appropriations amendment along partisan lines. His previous amendment was to defund the DACA Program.

This is a man who just last week compared immigrants to Santa Ana's army. He compared immigrants to a foreign invading army. It is a comparison that implies that an immigrant's goal is to harm the interest of the United States when they desperately want to be here and participate in the freedom—both economic and political—we love and enjoy. Yet again, after he said something like this, the Republican leadership hands him the gavel on immigration. That is why we continue to see nothing out of the House other than inflammatory, rhetorical amendment show votes. The score is clear: STEVE KING is still undefeated, and he is increasing his margin of victory every day.

Well, it doesn't have to be that way. STEVE KING doesn't represent the vast number of voters in either the Republican Party or even the tea party. STEVE KING does not represent Republicans in this House. When we joined together on a moderate bipartisan bill that would do so much good for America, it was supported by traditional Republican groups—the business community, the high-tech community, the agricultural growers, the Catholic Church, the evangelical Protestant church, supported this bipartisan bill. Some on the left thought it was too conservative.

It doesn't have to be this way. STEVE KING doesn't have to write into law whatever the House does. Poll after poll is clear that even Republican voters—conservative Republican voters—want to fix our broken immigration system in a manner that secures our borders, fixes our legal immigration system, and allows those in the undocumented status to get right with the law after a long path, including paying fines, paying back taxes, learning English, having to work, and going to the back of the line and waiting.

STEVE KING is much like the Wizard of Oz when it comes to immigration. He is pulling the levers behind the screen to make it seem he has the power, but the Republican Party will learn sooner or later—as Dorothy did in the "Wizard of Oz"—that KING actually works by fear, and he doesn't have the power and the wizard's power is overstated. He can't really do very much. The only way to get back home and do something real is in ourselves, not in that man behind the screen—the Wizard of Oz, STEVE KING. Where are the leaders in the Republican Party with the courage to stand up to STEVE KING and the far right and say: Enough is enough, we will not let our authority be hijacked by extremists whose xenophobia causes them to prefer maintaining a broken immigration system, where hundreds of thousands still cross the border illegally, instead of achieving a fair, tough, and practical long-term solution?

Make no mistake, immigration reform will either pass this year with bipartisan support and a bipartisan imprint or it will pass in a future year

with only Democratic support and a Democratic imprint because Democrats control Congress and the White House. Some Democrats argue it is better for us politically if the latter occurs, and many Republicans, in their hearts, know that is true. But we don't want that. We want to fix our country's problems. We want our GDP to grow 3.5 percent as the GPO said it would if we pass this bill. We want to secure our borders once and for all. We want a fair path to citizenship so that people who work and pay taxes can get right with the law.

Time is running out. We have less than 8 weeks to go to get something passed. There is still no serious proposal from Republicans. If the House fails to act during this window, the President would be more than justified in acting anytime after the summer is over to make whatever changes he feels are necessary to make our immigration system work better for those who are unfairly burdened by our broken laws, but that is not the preferable way to go. The preferable way to go is to go the way the Senate did where Democrats and Republicans banded together to create a moderate, thoughtful, comprehensive bill that fixes our broken immigration system once and for all.

In conclusion, I hope the immigration reform bill passes this year because our economy, our broken families, and our country so badly need it. Let's hope the House finally stops talking and finally stops paying obeisance to their Wizard of Oz on immigration, STEVE KING, and starts acting.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from Wyoming.

#### HEALTH CARE

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I come to the floor as the Senate begins the debate on the nomination of Sylvia Burwell to be Secretary of Health and Human Services. If she is confirmed for that job, she would be responsible for implementing thousands of pages of regulations related to the President's health care law. I think it is appropriate, as we consider this nomination, to take a little bit of time and talk about the state of the President's health care law.

Just this morning I visited with a number of people from Uinta County, WY. I will tell you what they know and what we all know, and that is there are many dangerous side effects of the law, such as people losing access to their doctor and getting smaller paychecks.

Today I want to talk specifically about the expensive side effect so many Americans are facing, and that is how much health insurance premiums are rising because of the law. States are starting to release the proposed premiums insurance companies expect to charge next year under the Obama health care law. The numbers are not good for the American people—for people who wanted affordable care, quality

care, and access to care, the kinds of things the President of the United States looked into the camera and promised them.

Virginia was one of the first States to put out the numbers. What is happening in the State of Virginia? Every health plan sold in the State exchange expects to raise its rates next year. The State expects some people to pay as much as 17 percent more next year.

In Vermont, it is a similar story. There are two companies offering plans in the State exchange. Yesterday we learned that one intends to raise rates 10 percent, the other expects to raise its rates 15 percent next year.

Last Friday Ohio released its proposed rates for people buying insurance through the exchange. The average premium in the State's individual market is expected to be 13 percent higher next year than it was last year. According to State insurance regulators, it is bad news, but it is what they expected.

The State Lieutenant Governor said:

Continued and unnecessary headwinds out of Washington are making it more difficult for job creators, hard-working Ohioans and their families to purchase health insurance.

President Obama said the Democrats should forcefully defend and be proud of the health care law. Is there a Democrat in this body—even one—who is willing to come to the floor and forcefully defend premium increases of 13 percent, 15 percent, or 17 percent in 1 year alone?

More States are going to be releasing their new premiums all summer. More people around the country are going to see these kinds of rate increases. This is an alarming side effect of the President's health care law. That is on top of the rate increases people have already had to pay for insurance for this year.

It is astonishing when you look at the numbers. It is not just families buying health insurance through the exchanges who are getting slammed. USA Today ran a headline last week which said:

More employees are getting hit with higher health insurance premiums and co-payments, and many don't have the money to cover unexpected medical expenses, a new report finds.

The report found that 56 percent of companies increased their employees' share of health premiums for copayments for doctors' visits last year after the health care law came into effect, and 59 percent of companies intend to do the same thing this year. So people buying insurance in the exchange are being hurt, people who get insurance through work are being hurt, and small businesses are being hurt as well.

There was an article in the Alaska Dispatch about this last Thursday. It said: "Alaska's small businesses feel the pinch of rising health care costs." The article tells the story of a restaurant owner with 24 employees. He wants to offer health insurance coverage, but he is paying \$5,000 a month more than he paid last year for his

share of the insurance. He is somebody who wants to provide insurance, but it is now \$5,000 more a month for his 24 employees. He says the costs are crippling and that it is like meeting another payroll every month. This small business owner said the health care law is "killing me." He says, "I just don't know how long we can keep absorbing these costs." These are costs put on this business owner in Alaska by every Member of the Senate who voted for this health care law—every one of them.

I invite any one of them to come down here to forcefully defend this law as the President requests that they do and be proud of what they have done to this small business owner. Are Democrats in the Senate who voted for this health care law proud of what the law is doing to this small business owner in Alaska? Are they willing to forcefully defend his having to pay an extra \$5,000 a month? That is what people are dealing with.

There is a story which just came out today about North Carolina—another State where a Senator has said: If you like what you have, you can keep it. The headline to this story is "ObamaCare cripples North Carolina small business."

It says:

A North Carolina woman currently living her dream—to own a salon—could soon shatter and crumble, leaving her employees to pay astronomical costs for health insurance, all because of ObamaCare.

Julia Vittorio, owner of Fresh Salon for the past five years, is worried that she will not be able to provide her employees with health insurance.

She said: "I think you just want the best for your employees."

I think that is what many people around the country want: the best for their employees.

She said: "We are a small business and it's very much like a family, so I care about our staff."

That is what she told a television station, WCNC in Charlotte.

She previously offered her employees health insurance and paid part of it, but has been forced to reconsider her decision because of the rising costs of premiums.

"We've been very proud to even carry it for this long, but it's certainly a concern moving into the future if we're going to be able to keep doing it," she explained.

Veronica Cook, a hairdresser who has worked at Fresh Salon since it opened, said: "It's frustrating and scary and you don't know what to expect."

I think that applies to many people around the country as a result of the President's health care law—this quote: "It's frustrating and scary and you don't know what to expect." She is not sure what she will do if she has to pay for her own insurance. That is what this devastating side effect of the President's health care law is doing to people all around the country.

The President says he wants everyone to have a fair shot. Democrats say it over and over. Is this small business owner getting a fair shot? Are the fam-

ilies of Ohio getting a fair shot when their premiums go up as much as 13 percent next year?

Some Democrats who voted for the health care law have come out and said that the rates may be going up, but not as fast as maybe they would have without the law. But let's take a step back. When they were trying to pass this health care law, Democrats said it would only raise premiums—no. Democrats never said it would only raise premiums by 10 to 13 percent. No. They said it would drop premiums by \$2,500 a year. That is what the President said—\$2,500 per family per year, and he said by the end of his first term.

Well, we met with the President in February of 2010 at the White House at the roundtable discussion. Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER, my colleague from Tennessee, asked specifically about the predictions that the premiums, as we have seen, would go up. The President was making these promises, claims that they would go down. The President denied again to each of us in a face-to-face meeting that they would go up. The President said: "That's just not the case."

Well, now what we do know is it is the case, and it was the case all along. People believed the President when he promised he would save them money. They thought that Democrats were giving them this fair shot the President talks about. Now they are finding out what they got: higher premiums, higher costs, higher deductibles, higher copays, loss of coverage, you can't keep your doctor. It is hard to believe the President of the United States.

This is not what people wanted. People wanted a fair shot. But it is not what the President and Democrats in Congress actually gave them in the health care law. Many of them who voted for it never read it. NANCY PELOSI said first you have to pass it before you get to find out what is in it. But it did not stop the Democrats who voted for it from making those same promises—promises: If you like what you have, you can keep it. If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor. Premiums will go down. All of those promises—each one of them turned out to be not true.

A fair shot is exactly what Republicans have offered, and that is—and I can tell you this as a doctor—what patients want is patient-centered care, not government-controlled and mandated care—a patient-centered approach that would solve the biggest problems that families face: access to care, cost of care, quality care. That means measures such as allowing small businesses to pool together in order to buy insurance more cheaply for their employees. It means letting people shop for health insurance that actually works for them and works for their families, not what the President says is best for them.

So in closing let me just say, these are just a couple of the solutions Republicans have offered to give Americans the care they need from a doctor

they choose at lower costs, without the outrageous, expensive side effects of the President's health care law.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

#### BURWELL NOMINATION

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, after months and months of polarizing and divisive debate in the Senate about the Affordable Care Act, I rise today to strongly support the nomination of Sylvia Mathews Burwell because I firmly believe she will help the Senate come together to jointly work to improve American health care.

The reality is both political parties have had valid points on this critical issue. My party believes passionately, as I do, that everyone must be covered. Republicans feel equally passionate about having a real role for the private sector to help hold down costs and promote innovation. The Affordable Care Act does both. Working together, working together under the leadership of a talented official like Sylvia Mathews Burwell, we can build on that.

Ms. Burwell has earned much respect here in the Congress on both sides of the aisle. She had our distinguished colleague from Oklahoma TOM COBURN and our friend from West Virginia JAY ROCKEFELLER at the witness table together talking about how she had worked with both of them. She is a leader with a head and a heart, and she is qualified and experienced for this critical job at this critical time.

She is a graduate of Harvard and Oxford, where she was a Rhodes Scholar. Early in her career, she showed a commitment to service by becoming part of the Clinton administration. She was the Staff Director of the National Economic Council beginning in 1993. Soon she transitioned to be Chief of Staff to the Treasury Secretary. In 1997, she became Deputy Chief of Staff to the President and moved the following year to become the Deputy Director of OMB.

She has extensive experience in the nonprofit sector. She led efforts to address some of the most pressing global health challenges of our time. In 2011 she became the head of the Walmart Foundation.

I noted Sylvia Mathews Burwell's support, but here are a couple comments from the other side of the aisle. Senator BURR had this to say about Sylvia Mathews Burwell: "She comes with a portfolio of experience that would make her a tremendous asset at addressing some of the challenges that that agency specifically and uniquely has."

Here is what Senator COBURN had to say: "The fact is, when you have somebody that's competent and also has strong character, you find a way to get past your differences to try to solve problems."

So she has strong, vigorous support from both sides of the aisle.

Now, we all understand that the Affordable Care Act is going to be a central focus of her work every day as Secretary. Once she is confirmed, I am convinced—and Senator HATCH and I have talked about this again on a bipartisan basis—that we can come together to make the law work better.

For example, my colleague from Utah has done very good work in fixing the dysfunctional reimbursement system for Medicare known as the SGR. With Sylvia Mathews Burwell at the helm, we will get that done, and we will improve Medicare transparency because the public and taxpayers and seniors should not be in the dark about critical services.

I know Senator BEGICH is going to be making some important remarks about veterans, and I just appreciate my colleague giving me this quick minute or two because I wanted to bring a bipartisan case for Sylvia Mathews Burwell to be confirmed. We will have the beginning of the process go forward today and more discussion about her and, I am sure, the Affordable Care Act as well.

I strongly, strongly urge my colleagues to advance her nomination and to support her when we go to a final vote.

With that, I thank my colleague and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

#### PROTECTING VETERANS

Mr. BEGICH. Madam President, I thank the Presiding Officer and thank my friend from Oregon.

I appreciate the opportunity to be on the floor today to talk about veterans care. It is an important issue that is not only critical to my State but across the country. As we know, it has been in the papers, on the TV, on the Internet, and everywhere else you can imagine.

There are few more important issues that we work on that have such a critical potential for impact on so many people, when you think about it. These folks have sacrificed so much for us—our veterans—and now it is important for us to make sure they have the proper care for all of their service.

Of course, the VA system is all over the national news, as I mentioned. Whatever you read, everywhere you turn, there is something about the system and what is going on. But I want to talk about Alaska's veterans programs that we are doing up there, especially around health care. For me, veterans are a big deal. It is a big deal because Alaska has so many.

Just to give you the lay of the land, we have over 77,000 veterans in Alaska. Almost 10 percent of the population of my State is veterans who have served this country in many different aspects throughout their careers and coming to Alaska to make it their home.

Along with the 77,000 veterans in Alaska, across the Nation the VA has

more than 11 million veterans registered or enrolled.

I have in the Chamber this picture of some rural veterans in Bethel, AK. I enjoyed being out there, and I have a story I will tell in a bit about the impact of some of the things we are doing in rural Alaska.

I think of these veterans like my uncle, U.S. Army Infantryman Joe Begich from up in the Iron Range of Minnesota, who will be there this weekend on an Honor Flight from Minnesota. My family is very proud of his service and the service of my late father-in-law Lou Bonito, who was an Army colonel in Vietnam.

We need to listen to their stories—not just on Memorial Day, not just on the D-day anniversary, which is this Friday. We need to listen to our veterans every single day. They deserve to be heard, just as they deserve to receive the benefits for which they fought.

Make no mistake about it. When I hear from veterans, the vast majority love the VA health care system and what is being provided to them.

I was in Alaska last week and met with veterans from all over the State. We do not have to wait for some headline or for CNN to run some story about what is wrong with the VA system.

My staff and I know what is going on with our care. We have regular meetings with the VA. As a matter of fact, when I first came to the Senate, some of the first issues we dealt with had to do with the VA and trying to make sure the Veterans Administration is dealing with Alaska's unique situation of how diverse it is and how far apart many of these services are in getting to our veterans.

When this issue started coming up on a national level this last week and over the last few weeks regarding the problems, especially in Phoenix—don't get me wrong, I am outraged, as is every American and every Alaskan, about what was going on there and what probably is happening in other VA facilities around the country as we hear about more internal audits being done. But we saw this problem. I saw this problem growing in Alaska. It was clear to me there was inadequate staffing in Alaska, along with some other programmatic problems, and systematic delivery system problems. What it meant was in Alaska, when I saw this problem, we had over almost 1,000 people waiting 2, 3 months for just their initial appointment to get VA health care services. This was unacceptable. So I convened a field hearing in Alaska to look at these issues and figure out what we could do to improve the system.

Today, the average wait time for our VA veterans, our veterans in Alaska, to get their initial appointment is now down to 9 days. As a matter of fact, the list, which we monitor on a regular basis from our office, is down to less than two dozen. That fluctuates from