

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH IRAN, SGR AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING LEGISLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, on April 2, President Obama unveiled a nuclear agreement with Iran. The purpose of the administration's negotiations with Iran was simple: Prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. But the agreement the Obama administration seems to have arrived at cast doubts on whether the administration will be able to achieve that goal. The framework does not shut down a single nuclear facility in Iran. It does not destroy a single centrifuge in Iran. It doesn't stop research and development on Iran's centrifuges. And it allows Iran to keep a substantial part of its existing stockpile of enriched uranium.

It is not surprising that Members of both parties are concerned about this agreement. Democrats and Republicans are worried because it appears the administration is not trying to stop Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon but simply trying to manage when Iran will develop one. Again and again during the process Secretary Kerry and the President seemed to forget that the goal of the negotiation was not a deal for its own sake but a deal that would actually stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

American priorities were sacrificed for the sake of getting an agreement. In the process, the administration may have ensured that the deal they finally arrived at is too weak to achieve its goal.

The stakes on this one are very high. The deal we are talking about here is not a trade agreement. It is not a land dispute. It is not a negotiation over water rights. It is a question of whether a tyrannical oppressive regime that has backed terrorists and announced its intention of taking the country of Israel off the map should get access to the most apocalyptic weapons known to man.

The deal we arrive at in the coming months will shape the Middle East for decades to come, and the cost of failure will be nothing less than a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Imagine for a second what it would be like to have a nuclear-armed Middle East.

Right now we are already witnessing a quasi-proxy war in Yemen with Iran supporting the Houthis and a Saudi Arabia-led coalition bombing the Houthis and supporting the ousted government. Imagine that same scenario if both major powers had nuclear weapons at their disposal. Make no mistake, that is the type of situation we could be facing if we fail to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, not to mention the threat that our ally Israel would be facing.

Today the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is set to mark up a bipartisan Iran bill for consideration by the full Senate. The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 would give Congress 60 days to approve or disapprove any final agreement. This legislation would ensure the American people, through their representatives in Congress, have a voice in any final agreement with Iran.

Given the fact the ramifications of this agreement will last well beyond the Obama administration, it is essential the American people have a voice in this process, which makes congressional review indispensable. This bill would also ensure Iran is held accountable for upholding its end of the agreement by requiring the President to evaluate Iran's compliance every 90 days.

This legislation has broad bipartisan support, and I believe it will quickly pass the Senate. I am hopeful the President will listen to the concerns the American people have expressed and ensure they are addressed before any final agreement is reached.

Every Member of Congress would like to see the President successfully conclude a deal with Iran that would prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, but the President needs to remember that a deal is only acceptable if it achieves that goal. If we can't secure a deal that will prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, then we should step back from the negotiating table and reimpose the sanctions that were so successful in driving Iran to the table in the first place. Anything less than a verifiable, accountable, and enforceable deal with Iran is a failure.

One bright spot in this Iran debate has been the bipartisan cooperation I just mentioned that has characterized the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act. This is a trend we are seeing a lot more of in the Republican-led Senate. There was the bipartisan Keystone bill, the bipartisan legislation to prevent suicide among veterans, the bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the Terrorism Risk Insurance Program, the bipartisan legislation to increase penalties for perpetrators and provide restitution for victims of child pornography, and now there is the bipartisan Iran bill.

This week we have another bipartisan agreement. Today, Congress will vote to repeal the flawed sustainable growth rate formula that has been used to calculate doctors' Medicare reimbursements since its enactment in 1997. This formula was supposed to control spending, but it never worked effectively. Since 2003, Congress has had to patch the formula regularly to ensure that physicians are paid a reasonable amount for their services.

In all, there have been 17 patches or short-term fixes—Band-Aids, if you will—enacted over the last 12 years. The bipartisan solution that is being considered on the Senate Floor today repeals this flawed formula perma-

nently and replaces it with a payment system that focuses on quality, not quantity. It also puts in place the first significant reforms in Medicare in a long time.

Without reforms, the Medicare trust fund will be insolvent as soon as 2030, leaving seniors without access to the care they have been promised. The bipartisan agreement we are passing today starts the process of strengthening Medicare and putting it on a more sustainable path going forward so that the current generation of seniors as well as future generations can enjoy the benefits they have been promised.

With the return of bipartisanship and regular order we have had here over the first few months of the Republican-led Senate, I am disappointed the Democrats are continuing to obstruct a bill that should be the most obviously bipartisan bill we have taken up all year. The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act would provide law enforcement with additional resources to combat the scourge of human trafficking and increase the resources available to trafficking victims.

This bill was cosponsored by 12 Democrats, in addition to 21 Republicans, and it appeared to have strong bipartisan support for passage. In fact, it was reported out of the Judiciary Committee unanimously.

Unfortunately, Members of the Democratic Party's most extreme wing decided to fixate on a funding restriction in the bill that has been a routine part of appropriations bills and spending bills around here for decades. The Hyde amendment reflects the sentiments of a majority of Americans. That is the funding restriction that I referred to. The sentiment of a majority of Americans is that the Federal Government shouldn't be using taxpayer dollars to pay for abortions. It has been the consensus view around here literally since 1976.

It is unfortunate the leftwing of the Democratic Party has taken the extreme step of holding up relief for victims of human trafficking over language that simply maintains a status quo—the status quo that has been in place around here since 1976.

Every year thousands of innocent victims—most frequently women and children—are trafficked within the borders of the United States. Many of these victims are children who are bought and sold to feed the twisted desires of sexual predators. Others are forced into lives of slave labor, compelled to work in the shadows without the protection of the law. Rescuing these innocent victims and ensuring their captors are punished must be a priority.

The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act has been endorsed by 200 advocacy groups, including the NAACP, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Rights4Girls, the National Association to Protect Children, the Fraternal

Order of Police, and the National Conference of State Legislatures. It provides new tools for law enforcement and new help for trafficking victims.

It is time for the Democrats to stop obstructing this legislation and to allow the Senate to pass this bill—a bipartisan achievement and something that is much needed and long overdue. There is a crisis in this country that needs to be addressed. We can do something about it. We ought to do it, and we ought to do it now.

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

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

SGR LEGISLATION

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, we are here today because our Medicare status quo is not working and it hasn't been working for a long time.

For decades, Medicare has been on a path to insolvency. In 1997, Congress attempted to impose some fiscal discipline on the program by creating the sustainable growth rate or SGR. This is a budget-enforcing mechanism that calls for annual adjustments to the amounts physicians are reimbursed for treating Medicare patients.

The SGR was originally billed as a permanent solution to Medicare's unsustainable fiscal trajectory. The idea was to restrain Medicare spending by linking physician reimbursements to a target amount based on the general performance of the economy as a whole.

While this may have seemed like a good idea at the time—when the economy was relatively strong and stable and growing—it quickly lost its appeal when we went into the 2001 recession just a few years later.

The plan also suffered from the central planners' fatal conceit that trusts bureaucracies, rather than consumer preferences and real price pressures, to determine the cost of a particular good or service. As it turns out, the actual cost of medical goods and services and the practice patterns of physicians do not necessarily align with the health of the economy or the predictions of government bureaucrats.

So each year since 2003, the SGR formula has called for cuts to physician payments, and each year—often several times each year—Congress has passed legislation to temporarily prevent the reimbursement reductions from kicking in.

While these so-called doc fix bills have yielded some modest savings as new spending has traditionally been offset with cuts elsewhere in the budget, they have not restrained the quick-

ening pace of Medicare spending. While they have successfully avoided cuts to doctors' pay, they have put the Medicare system in a near constant state of uncertainty and instability, leaving Medicare doctors and their patients hanging in the balance.

America's physicians and America's seniors deserve better than this, but they also deserve better than the bill before us today—H.R. 2, the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015.

Congress has long wanted to repeal the SGR—and with good reason—but this is not the way to do it. Not only does the House bill double down on Medicare's broken price control model, but it does so, according to the Congressional Budget Office, while adding \$141 billion to the Federal debt over the next decade.

Let's look first at the policy implications of the underlying bill.

The new payment scheme proposed in this bill is simply more of the same inefficient form of central planning that further embeds Washington bureaucracy into every aspect of our health care system. It continues the role of the Federal Government as price setter, rather than the price taker, in the free market. It also inflates the administration's power as the regulator and compliance officer.

The principal change proposed by H.R. 2 is to move from a Medicare payment system based on volume to one based on bureaucratic measures of quality and value, but we already know this doesn't work because it is the same policy introduced under ObamaCare that requires physicians to comply with established government guidelines and stick to rigid, one-size-fits-all best practices or pay a penalty.

Instead, we should be freeing the health care community from heavy-handed regulation and constant intrusive bureaucratic scrutiny. Doing so is the only way to allow doctors to develop individualized quality treatment plans for each of their patients and to unleash innovation in the delivery of health care.

But with the current doc fix expiring tomorrow and Medicare physicians facing a 21-percent pay cut, there is not enough time to reopen the bill and rewrite it with better policies. But there is—there is—enough time to address the fiscal irresponsibility of this bill.

That is why I am offering an amendment to this bill that would simply require Congress to pay for that \$141 billion under its normal pay-as-you-go budget rules—rules that this bill explicitly exempts itself from in section 525 of the bill. The pay-as-you-go budgeting rules, which share bipartisan support in Congress and the White House, wouldn't force us to offset the new spending immediately. Rather, we would have until the end of the year to find these savings and 10 years in which to achieve them.

My amendment would not delay or change anything else in the bill. Doc-

tors and seniors wouldn't notice any difference. It would just require Congress to budget for the costs, just as we promised we would.

Indeed, just 2 weeks ago, the Senate passed a 10-year balanced budget, stating specifically that any SGR patch or repeal would not add to the deficit. So passing this bill in its current form would not only be irresponsible, it would be dishonest. It would be inconsistent with what we have just said with the budget.

We have known for a long time that Medicare cannot survive without structural changes to its price control system, and we know this bill, H.R. 2, does not contain such reforms. They aren't there. According to a report issued last week by Medicare's actuaries, "Under the new payment system, most doctors will see cuts in 2025."

The only way to put Medicare on a sound fiscal footing is to make it work for America's doctors and for America's seniors. To do that, we need to work toward replacing the centralized price-fixing system of the status quo with a functional consumer market that empowers seniors' access to the high-quality, individualized health care they deserve, and that enables doctors to do what they do best, which is provide the very best medical treatment in the entire world.

This is my goal. I believe this is a goal widely shared within this Chamber. But we can't deceive ourselves: To get there, we must be responsible with the public trust and we must be honest with ourselves. To that end, I implore my colleagues to support this amendment.

To put it very simply, paying for this new spending is the right thing to do, and we just passed a budget promising that we would do it. My amendment does nothing more than hold us to that very promise.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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

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

RECESS

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess as under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:28 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

SGR LEGISLATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, hopefully this afternoon we will take up a