

real health care reform that will increase competition, reduce costs, and expand access to lifesaving care that improves the quality of their lives and, most importantly, will provide predictability and sustainability in the marketplace.

This crisis demands real leadership, and I continue to remain committed to working with my colleagues on free-market solutions that will bring about real change that will actually uphold the promises that were made.

In Colorado, I heard from countless individuals who have been displaced from their plans, and it is time for Congress to stand up as well.

The Denver Post article that I referred to about the broken health care system in Colorado's Western Slope begins with a statement from Terri Newland of Glenwood Springs, CO. This is the headline: "Colorado mountain residents struggle to pay for health insurance." The story starts like this: "The new era of affordable health care bypassed Terri Newland."

Millions of Americans have seen the Affordable Care Act's era of affordable health care bypass them, and this body's responsibility for that law can only be made up by repealing the law and putting in its place a bill that actually increases the quality of care and decreases the cost of care.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

UNITED STATES-CUBA RELATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, since December of 2014, when the United States and Cuba ended 54 years of diplomatic isolation that had accomplished nothing good for the people of Cuba or the United States, there has been an explosion of engagement between our two countries. The number of U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba has skyrocketed. Talks between both governments resulted in agreements to resume direct airline, ocean ferry, and mail service. There is expanded cooperation in a wide range of bilateral and regional issues. These are encouraging steps, but there is a long road ahead.

For more than half a century, whatever problems there were in Cuba the Cuban Government could blame on the United States because of our embargo. Some Members of the House and Senate have expressed disappointment, and criticized President Obama's opening to Cuba because the restoration of diplomatic relations has not quickly brought about dramatic changes in Cuba's repressive political system and did not reverse 54 years of history in 54 days.

Well, these Members of Congress are either naive or simply prefer to ignore the positive changes that are occurring and choose to ignore or dismiss the views of the overwhelming majority of Cubans and Americans who support the restoration of relations. They continue to defend a discredited policy of isolation that through all those decades, and Republican and Democratic administrations, failed to achieve any of its objectives.

As President Obama said, if you try something for 50 years and it doesn't work, it is time to try something else. In the past 15 months, although the naysayers will not publicly admit it, the Cuban people have a sense of hope about the future that has not existed since the time of the 1959 revolution. I know. I have seen and heard it on my trips there.

It is also important to recognize that the majority of Cubans alive today were born after the revolution. And just as Cuba's population has changed, so the world has changed.

Overwhelmingly, Cuba's younger generation has experienced enough of a paternalistic, Communist dictatorship and economic stagnation to know that is not what they want. It is no surprise that their reaction to President Obama's extraordinary speech in Havana was warmly and enthusiastically received by them, while several top Cuban officials, sensing the inspiring impact of the President's words, felt compelled to criticize our President. I was there for that visit. I saw the reaction of the Cuban people.

The raising of the American flag in Havana last August symbolized the beginning of a new era in U.S.-Cuban relations, but change was happening in Cuba well before then, and it is going to continue at its own pace. Ultimately, the Cuban people—not the United States—will determine that pace and what a post-Castro Cuba will look like.

My wife Marcelle and I stood there at our Embassy as the flag went up, and we heard the cheers of the Cuban people standing just outside the gates of the Embassy.

We can contribute to the process of change in positive ways. One way is through student exchanges. Last month, Vermont students from Burlington, Essex, Shelburne, and Bristol traveled to Cuba to participate in a week of Little League baseball games and cultural exchange. Marcelle and I went to Burlington to see them off. I cannot begin to describe thrill in their faces, the excitement they felt. We gave them an American flag to take with them. The Vermonters didn't speak much Spanish, and the Cubans spoke almost no English, but it didn't really matter. They had translators, and the game of baseball is a language across cultures.

Here is a picture of the Vermonters with the Cuban ball players holding the American flag that we gave them, the Cuban flag, and a Vermont flag. This

was taken in Cuba. I love to take photographs. I wish I had been there to take that one. We know a picture is worth a thousand words. They show how just a few days of competing on a baseball diamond can help bridge a half-century divide between two countries and cultures. Anybody who has children—or grandchildren—who play baseball or Little League ball recognizes these smiles. We know what it means. They don't speak the same language, but they speak one language, which is the game of baseball.

The Vermonters voiced high praise for the Cuban players who won all the games, except the all-star game at the end when they shared players and were evenly matched.

But winning isn't everything. As the Vermont players recounted after returning home, it was not only a fun week of baseball, but one of the most rewarding parts of the trip was the time spent after the game getting to know the Cuban players, getting to know their families, and learning about life in Cuba.

This is actually the second baseball exchange involving Vermont and Cuban Little Leaguers, the first being in 2008 when a group from Vermont and New Hampshire played a series of games on the outskirts of Havana. One of those players said the team went to Cuba just to have fun: "We are not here to win. If they hear about us, maybe other teams will want to do this or maybe even get a Cuban team to the United States to play."

Lisa Brighenti in my office took this photograph. I think it says it all. You can't see their faces, but we know one is Cuban and one is American. These are kids playing a Little League game. And think of what this picture says to all of us.

Children don't care about the politics. They don't even care about the differences in language. They just care about the things that unite them.

I remember speaking with President Obama shortly after he became President and saying we had to change our policy toward Cuba. I told him there would be a memo saying he should hold tight, the Castros will be gone any day. I pointed out that same memo was sent to President Eisenhower and President Kennedy and President Johnson and President Nixon, and he said: I get your point.

Nothing changed during more than half a century when we tried to isolate Cuba. Now I think change will come.

Our governments remain far apart on key issues. A few Members of Congress continue to stubbornly obstruct efforts to end the embargo, but as every poll has shown in this country the American people—like these young Vermont athletes—are showing us a way forward by breaking down barriers on their own.

I am so proud of these young Vermonters. They know. They know what the future looks like. As for the rest of us, let's step toward the future with them.

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

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in morning business, with time reserved for the Democrats.

Ms. COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. President.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2577, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2577) making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Collins amendment No. 3896, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell (for Lee) amendment No. 3897 (to amendment No. 3896), to prohibit the use of funds to carry out a rule and notice of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

McConnell (for Nelson/Rubio) amendment No. 3898 (to amendment No. 3896), making supplemental appropriations for fiscal year 2016 to respond to Zika virus.

McConnell (for Cornyn) modified amendment No. 3899 (to amendment No. 3896), making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016.

McConnell (for Blunt) modified amendment No. 3900 (to amendment No. 3896), Zika response and preparedness.

Collins (for Blunt) amendment No. 3946 (to amendment No. 3900), to require the periodic submission of spending plan updates to the Committee on Appropriations.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I thought it would be useful for our colleagues if I gave a brief update on

where we are. First of all, I think it is important to know that more than 70 Senators had input into the Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development and Related Agencies funding bill. I am sure if you added the number of Senators who weighed in on the VA-Military Construction bill, the number is even higher.

We worked very hard in the subcommittee process and the full committee process to incorporate suggestions from many of our colleagues to produce a bipartisan bill. The ranking member, my friend and colleague Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island, has been a tremendous leader in this effort. We have worked in a very transparent and collaborative manner to bring us where we are today.

Since we started the debate on this bill, we have had 17 amendments that have been adopted by unanimous consent on the two divisions of the bill. That has required a great deal of work, but I think it shows the good faith of both of the managers of the bill and the sponsors of these amendments that we were able to work together, compromise, negotiate, and get them adopted in three separate packages.

We are continuing that process. More and more amendments have been filed, and we are continuing to see how we can best accommodate the concerns that have been raised by our colleagues while keeping the essential principles of this bill and the desire to make sure we keep on track with the appropriations process.

I believe it is a great credit to the Senate, to the leaders, and to Senator MITCH MCCONNELL, who has made as a goal that we would report all of the appropriations bills, bring them to the floor, one by one, for full and open debate, the way it should be, and that we get our work done so we avoid the situation of either having a series of continuing resolutions—which lock in last year's priorities and lead to wasteful spending, which is not a good solution and ends up costing us more because agencies can't plan, they can't do their contracting activity—or having the other unfortunate outcome of bundling all 12 of the appropriations bills into one huge omnibus bill that is thousands of pages long and is very difficult for Members to know exactly what is in the bill.

That is not a good way to legislate. It is not in keeping with our responsibilities. I am proud the Appropriations Committee in this Chamber is doing its job and that the Republican leader set as the goal that we are starting the appropriations process earlier than ever before. The Energy and Water appropriations bill was passed earlier than any appropriations bill in literally decades. I would note that would not be possible without the cooperation we have had from our Democratic colleagues on the committee. We have worked as teams. That is the way the process should work. I could not have a better partner in that regard than Senator JACK REED.

We also had a very vigorous debate yesterday on the funding that is necessary to combat the very serious threat posed by the Zika virus. We know this virus causes very severe birth defects, in some cases, and has been linked to Guillain-Barre syndrome, which can lead to paralysis and even death. So this is a serious public health threat.

A couple of weeks ago, Senator JOHN-
NY ISAKSON and I went to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, GA. We were briefed on the threat posed by Zika, which is carried by a mosquito that is known as the cockroach in the mosquito world because it is so difficult to get rid of. It can reproduce in water in a container that is size of a bottle cap. We know Zika has already become an epidemic in Puerto Rico and that there are confirmed cases in nearly every State in the Union. That is because, even if you live in a far Northern State where the type of mosquito that causes Zika is not present, such as the State represented by the Presiding Officer, Zika is still a threat. People travel. We know it can be transmitted through sexual contact. That is why we are seeing Zika showing up in virtually every State. We need to get ahead of this epidemic. That is why we had three different approaches offered yesterday on the Senate floor. Cloture was successfully invoked on a bipartisan proposal offered by Senators BLUNT and MURRAY that provides more than \$1 billion to counter effectively the threat of Zika.

The last thing we want is not to have acted against this serious public health threat and find that pregnant women, who are especially at risk, are going to be infected and, in some cases, have children who will have a lifetime of serious disabilities as a result of the impact of Zika. We are hearing more and more about the dangers of the Zika virus every day.

I have great confidence in the CDC, which is the major interface with our local and State public health agencies, to do an excellent job on prevention and education of providers and the public. They are also working on diagnostic tests so we can have a more rapid response to Zika. The National Institutes of Health is working on a vaccine which we hope will be available in another year, but in the meantime this truly is a public health emergency.

I believe the Senate deserves great credit for putting the Zika supplemental on our bill and providing adequate funding to do the job, to do the job that is necessary to counter this very serious threat.

We will have to proceed to a vote on the underlying Blunt-Murray amendment now that we have invoked cloture by 68 votes. I would note also that there is a 1 p.m. deadline today on filing first-degree amendments to the substitute bill. I also anticipate that this afternoon we will have a debate on Senator LEE's amendment, which has to do with a rule the Department of