

continue to use his strong voice on behalf of the issues he cares about, on behalf of his State and our country, which he has served so well.

Also, Senator CORKER. Senator CORKER and I were elected to the Senate at the same time in 2006. He was the only Republican Senator in our incoming class. I see Senator CARDIN here in the Chamber; he was also a Member of that class. We all have remained friends with Senator CORKER over the years. I will tell you that Senator CORKER never misses Senator McCASKILL's annual chili party. He has been very good to us, and we have worked together for years.

Before becoming a Senator, BOB CORKER had two previous experiences as an elected official. He was the mayor of Chattanooga and the president of a high school class. He claims that he did not even have to campaign for that job. Here is what he said: "I just woke up one day and was president." That is not how it usually works in politics.

It turns out that BOB's roots were actually, of course, in business. He saved up \$8,000 to start his own construction company at age 25 and then expanded it to 17 other States, and he has brought this commonsense business background to tackle difficult problems head-on, while always calling it as he sees it.

We have seen that in his chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee, where BOB has spoken up to defend the values that define America, including strongly stating that he felt this Chamber and the administration had to do more in response to the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

We have seen it as Senator CORKER has worked to strengthen our alliances. I can tell you, when I was having trouble getting the nominees to be Ambassadors to Sweden and Norway through the Congress last Congress, which is very important in my State with its Scandinavian roots, I knew that I could count on his support.

We have seen it in his efforts to combat human trafficking, an issue I also care deeply about.

BOB has so much to be proud of at the end of his chapter of public service and begins another back home in Tennessee.

Finally, I want to recognize my friend and colleague, Senator DEAN HELLER of Nevada.

DEAN has dedicated so much of his life to public service on behalf of his State—in Nevada's legislature, as secretary of state, in Congress, and in the U.S. Senate.

His family moved to Nevada when he was only 9 months old. As the son of an auto mechanic and a school cook, he has often said that he is likely one of the only Senators who can change your oil and fix your transmission.

Nevada is obviously a State with no shortage of tourism, and DEAN has worked with me as cochair of the tourism caucus to promote tourism

across our entire country. He understands that when we increase tourism, we not only create jobs and strengthen our economy, we also strengthen our alliances and export our values.

It is that same philosophy that is behind his efforts, along with Senator FLAKE who is here in this Chamber, to normalize relations with Cuba. DEAN and I traveled to Cuba, along with Senator FLAKE, with President Obama, and I deeply appreciated his commitment, as well as Senator FLAKE's and others, to improving the relationship between our countries and opening up new opportunities for American businesses.

I have valued our time together on the Commerce Committee, where we led bills that passed and were signed into law regarding more women getting into science, technology, engineering, and math at NASA. We are proud that both bills were signed into law.

I have enjoyed serving with DEAN HELLER in the U.S. Senate, and I thank him for his service.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I take this time to talk about the recent court decision concerning the Affordable Care Act.

I see that Senator FLAKE is on the floor. I was listening to my colleague, Senator KLOBUCHAR, talk about the four colleagues on the Republican side who will be leaving. I have already had a chance in the Foreign Relations Committee to talk about Senator FLAKE, but I want him to know, and I want the American people to know, that there is no finer Senator than Senator FLAKE. He has shown great integrity on foreign policy issues, on decency issues, and on his principles.

I will never forget our visit to the southern part of Africa, where Senator FLAKE was a missionary when he was a little bit younger, and his passion for the people and their needs has never stopped. That is just one example. I can name many more examples of how Senator FLAKE has inspired all of us. The courage that he has shown has been an inspiration. I wish him the best as he moves on to the next chapter in his life.

I rise today to discuss America's access to healthcare and the patient protections that are currently being threatened by President Trump and his administration; specifically, his decision to not uphold the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the law of the land.

Last week, Judge Reed O'Connor of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas ruled that the Affordable Care Act is unconstitutional and that the law is not severable from and cannot stand without the individual mandate penalty, which Republicans eliminated in their December

2017 tax bill. While this ruling is being appealed, President Trump has the opportunity to stand up for the American people.

Over and over again, we have heard President Trump promise to lower prescription drug prices for seniors, end the opioid epidemic, and improve the availability and affordability of health insurance. Yet, for any of his proposed policies to succeed, President Trump needs the Affordable Care Act, even though he will not admit it.

Without the Affordable Care Act, which closed the doughnut hole for seniors, many older Americans would likely spend around \$2,000 more in out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs each year. Rather than helping our seniors lower costs, with the loss of the protection under the Affordable Care Act—the benefits—they will end up paying more.

Furthermore, the Affordable Care Act created the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation, which is the basic infrastructure for the Trump administration to test the recently released drug-pricing proposals. Without the ACA, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation would not exist, and President Trump would need congressional approval to implement such a sweeping national test on drug prices.

We all should be committed to reducing the cost of prescription drugs in this country. The President ran on that when he was Candidate Trump.

We know that as Americans we pay so much more than people from other industrialized nations for the same drugs, many of which are manufactured right here in America. The ACA—the Affordable Care Act—helped us move in the right direction. We need to build on that. Let us work together to preserve the progress we have made under the Affordable Care Act and to pass additional legislation allowing us to use the collective bargaining power of our consumers so that we can pay lower prices than our friends from Canada because we have a bigger market. We should be paying lower—not twice as much.

President Trump says that he wants to end the opioid epidemic. By getting rid of the Affordable Care Act, he will cause millions of Americans to lose their current health insurance. This is because any rollback in Medicaid coverage, the biggest payer for behavioral healthcare, would result in roughly 1.2 million people with addiction and mental health issues losing access to affordable treatment.

If you don't have insurance protection for behavioral health or addiction, you are going to be much less likely to be able to get access to that needed treatment in order to deal with your addiction.

We know we need a comprehensive approach to deal with the opioid crisis. Yes, we want to stop the dangerous drug fentanyl from coming into this country. Yes, we want to stop the distribution of illegal drugs. But we also

have to deal with the reality of people who have addictions, and they need to be able to get help. Part of that is having access to care and having coverage. The elimination of the Affordable Care Act will move us in the wrong direction.

We need to continue to build on legislation we have worked on together—bipartisan—that provides additional resources to our State and local governments to deal with the opioid crisis. Part of that is the expansion of coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Scrapping the healthcare law will not only leave Medicaid expansion enrollees high and dry; it will also hurt very vulnerable populations that were unable to buy affordable, comprehensive coverage before the Affordable Care Act, including more than 130 million women, children, and other people with preexisting conditions.

Let's remember that prior to the Affordable Care Act, many Americans—millions of Americans—were denied full coverage because of preexisting condition restrictions. The Maryland Health Benefit Exchange estimates that in Maryland, there are approximately 2.5 million non-elderly Marylanders with preexisting conditions, 320,000 of whom are children. They are at risk with this court decision in Texas.

Undoing current law would also eliminate strong patient protection. Insurers would once again be able to impose annual and lifetime limits, discriminate against women, and charge higher out-of-pocket costs. Young adults would no longer be able to stay on their parents' insurance until they turn 26.

We are talking about tens of millions of Americans who are at risk by this court decision. It is absurd to move back and tell these people they are going to lose the protection they now have under our healthcare system.

It is simple. President Trump must take this opportunity to stand up for the American people and defend the law. That is what the President of the United States should be doing. That is why I joined Senator MANCHIN and many of my Democratic colleagues in a letter urging President Trump to direct the Department of Justice to defend the law of the land. Yes, we should defend the law. It is our responsibility to make sure we protect the people of this Nation.

Let's build on the progress we have made together. We know we need to improve our healthcare system. We know the cost of prescription drugs is too high. We can do something about that. We know the individual marketplace needs improvement. We want to make sure there is affordable, quality insurance for everyone in this country.

Yes, we need to build on the progress we have made to make improvement, but what I urge all of us to do—let's maintain the protections we have today. Let's not go back to the time when being a woman was a preexisting

condition and you couldn't get full coverage. Let's not go back to the days when, if you had a heart ailment and you tried to buy an insurance policy, you were not going to get coverage for what you need. You were going to get those exclusions. That is where we were before we passed the Affordable Care Act.

Let's build on the Affordable Care Act. Let's work together as Democrats and Republicans. Let's defend the progress we have made. I hope the President will join us, but let's take that responsibility and build on that and work together, Democrats and Republicans, to build a stronger system for all.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOZMAN). The Senator from Montana.

PUBLIC LANDS BILL

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I appreciate that and thank the Senator.

Look, we are at the end of the year. Oftentimes in this body, things happen at the end of the year that we are not too proud of, but we have an opportunity to do something we could be very, very proud of, and that is, pass the public lands bill.

This public lands bill would permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This is the most effective conservation tool we have in this country right now. Whether it is establishing a park in one of your cities or towns or setting land aside so we can get better access to our public lands, this is a critically important fund that I hope we can get done as part of this lands package that is moving forward and hopefully will move forward before this Congress ends.

LWCF—the Land and Water Conservation Fund—has invested over half a billion dollars in Montana alone.

There is another component of this bill that I am particularly fond of. It is a bill that will protect Yellowstone Park and the headwaters of the Yellowstone River. It is called the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act. It is a simple bill. It is a bipartisan bill. It is a bill that will help support the hundreds of small businesses in Paradise Valley. And it is called Paradise Valley for a good reason—because it is paradise, and we need to keep it a paradise by preventing large-scale mining in that region.

I am just asking Congress to act. I am asking my fellow Members, my fellow Senators to add some common sense to the negotiations that are moving on here and pass this lands bill because it is critically important for our kids and our grandkids.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, here we are again at the end of a quarter and

the end of a calendar year—not the end of our fiscal year. But here we are again with late-night sessions and people running around in a very unprofessional manner, in my opinion, talking about how to get our government funded.

Let me put this in perspective. This is the end of December. October, November, and December are the first fiscal quarter of fiscal year 2019. We are already one-fourth through this fiscal year, and we are still talking about the completion of authorizations and appropriations to fund the government for this year—not next year, this year.

In 2018, the Senate and, indeed Congress did something we haven't done in a long time. For the first time in 22 years, we did get 75 percent of the Federal Government discretionary spending funded. By the way, that is only about 25 percent of what we spend as a federal government, but that is a conversation for another day.

On July 31 this year and earlier than that—we started the appropriations process earlier this year and had an opportunity in the Appropriations Committee. The subcommittees and the committee did a fabulous job this year. Democrats and Republicans got together behind closed doors, no cameras, and really argued the points and came to compromises on most of the issues, so that by July 31, we had funded 12.25 percent of this year's Federal budget for discretionary spending.

We decided as a body, with the leadership's approval, to stay here in August of this year. Because of that, we went from 12.5 percent to 75 percent of the discretionary budget being appropriated and approved. Indeed, the appropriators did their job this year and would have gotten 100 percent had we not had the disagreement over border security.

Let's be clear. As we sit here at the end of this quarter, the Senate should have already totally funded the Federal Government's discretionary budget by September 30 of this year. That was 3 months ago. Instead, what we are about to do is have a vote in the next day or two on a continuing resolution for the remaining portion of this year's Federal budget, the 25 percent. This will be the 186th continuing resolution this Congress and other Congresses have used to continue to fund the government in a temporary manner.

I have a major problem with that. First of all, it is an admission that Congress can't do its job. The No. 1 responsibility of Congress is to make sure the government is funded. It is one of the reasons Thirteen Colonies got together in the first place to form this country.

This continuing resolution, as bad as it is, should not be used, but even in its current potential existence, it is so bad for a couple of other reasons.

No. 1, it does not address the border security issue on which the President and the Democrats had prior agreements. Even just a few weeks ago, we