

is the kind of leader our Nation needs at HHS during this challenging time.

He is a proven leader who spent his career fighting to expand healthcare—to expand it—protecting both patients and consumers and working to strengthen both Medicare and Medicaid.

As a Congressman, as I mentioned, he was instrumental in drafting and working to pass the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the so-called ACA. And as California's attorney general, he has led the fight to protect it.

Now, my view of the disagreement on the other side of the aisle is just that. This is someone who worked as a Member of Congress and then has worked as attorney general to pass and then uphold the ACA.

On the other side of the aisle, they don't like that because they have been committed as a party here in the Senate and in the House—both Republican caucuses have been committed to two things on healthcare: destroying the ACA, which means destroying all protections for preexisting conditions and—it is important to add this—they have been dedicated to ending—not limiting, not cutting back—ending Medicaid expansion, which, of course, accounted for most of the healthcare gains. Millions of Americans have healthcare today because of the expansion of Medicaid. It is the official position of the Republican Party to end that—to say to all those millions of Americans: You don't deserve healthcare coverage. That is their position based upon what they have supported in bill after bill that came before the Senate. We know that. That is a fact. And until they move away from that position, they will try to take down the nomination of or oppose anyone who wants to uphold the ACA, uphold all protections for preexisting conditions, uphold and support the expansion of Medicaid, one of the best expansions of healthcare in American history, not just recent history, in all of American history.

So I would support Attorney General Becerra just based upon what he has done on healthcare because it happens to be in the best interests of the American people to expand healthcare and the best interests of the people I represent.

I don't come across many people in Pennsylvania coming up to me, saying: I want you to lessen the number of people in the United States or in my State that have healthcare. I want you to cut that back. I want you to cut back on the Medicaid Program—which folks on the other side of the aisle want to do as well.

They not only want to end Medicaid expansion—end it completely—they want to cut the Medicaid Program by hundreds of billions of dollars over 10 years. That is their official position. It has been their position for years to cut the Medicaid Program and to end Medicaid expansion—cut the Medicaid Program by hundreds of billions of dollars.

So if you are against that, they are going to be opposing you, whether it is for confirmation or anything else, because they are the party that wants to cut Medicaid, not by \$100 billion over 10 years, not by \$200 billion or \$300 billion. Look at their budgets year after year. They want to cut it \$500 billion or \$700 billion. One year they even proposed—here in the debates about the budgets, one year they even proposed cutting the Medicaid Program by \$1 trillion. That was the official position of the Republican Party. So if you want to oppose them on that, then they will try to take you down.

The Medicaid Program, by the way, pays for half—almost half—of the births in America. Of the babies born in America, almost half of those births are paid for by Medicaid—the Medicaid Program—the program they want to cut by \$500 billion, at least, and sometimes a lot more than that.

So that is why they are against him, because they want to cut back on healthcare.

Now, his leadership of this Agency could not come at a more important time. Our Nation is facing the greatest public health crisis in more than a century, since the horror of 1918. Now we are facing a similar challenge.

We also have a jobs crisis. So the faster we put this pandemic behind us, the better it is for creating a lot more jobs and lifting our economy out of the ditch that it has been in the last year.

So we need a strong leader at HHS. We need someone who has the experience, the integrity, to lead us in that Agency to help guide us out of the crisis. I am confident—very confident—that Xavier Becerra is that leader, and I urge my colleagues to vote in support of his nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The junior Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, the first thing I would like to do is correct what my colleague from Pennsylvania said with regard to preexisting conditions.

I was here last year. I brought to the floor a bill that would say it didn't matter what the Supreme Court did; we would make sure that we could keep preexisting conditions if the Supreme Court declared that the Affordable Care Act was not constitutional. The Democrats blocked it.

I have been up here 2 years, and I have never seen once my Republican colleagues want to reduce spending for Medicaid.

What I do think is unfair is, in my State of Florida, what money we receive from the Federal Government is significantly less per person than what a State like New York has. So I would like changes to the Medicaid Program. I would like it to be a fair program in which States like Florida will get treated just as well as States like New York.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 798

Madam President, I rise today to discuss an insane issue in the Democrats' COVID spending bill that we need to fix.

Tucked into the Democratic bill is a provision to give \$1,400 stimulus checks to inmates. That is right. As our Nation faces a public health crisis and a crippling debt crisis, Democrats are handing out stimulus checks with your tax dollars to Federal inmates who don't pay income taxes, have all their needs—food and medical expenses included—paid for by taxpayers, and they do nothing to stimulate the economy. It simply doesn't make sense.

My friends and colleagues, Senators BILL CASSIDY, TOM COTTON, and TED CRUZ, tried to fix this by introducing an amendment to strip this out of the Democratic bill, but the Democrats wouldn't have it.

Senate Democrats voted unanimously to block the passage of that good amendment and chose instead to waste even more taxpayer dollars by sending \$1,400 checks to inmates.

Let's talk about what that means for American taxpayers. There are nearly 1.5 million State and Federal inmates incarcerated in Federal prisons across the United States. These are people convicted of committing serious crimes and victimizing their fellow Americans.

Under this bill the Democrats passed, American taxpayers are on the hook for \$1,400 checks to some of the most heinous people we have ever seen. I am talking about people like the racist Charleston Church shooter, Dylann Roof; serial rapist and predator, Larry Nassar; aspiring terrorist, Muhammad Dakhalla, who tried to join ISIS and is now in prison in Georgia; convicted serial killer and rapist, Mark Goudeau, who is on death row in Arizona; convicted cop killer, Michael Addison, who is on death row in New Hampshire; and the monster who killed 17 innocent Floridians in Parkland at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14, 2018.

How could anyone—anyone—possibly justify sending checks to these people?

If we send \$1,400 checks to all State and Federal inmates, all 1.5 million, that is more than \$2 billion—\$2 billion in taxpayer money going to stimulus checks for inmates.

That is \$2 billion that could be used to help our small businesses recover; \$2 billion that could be used to enhance vaccine development and distribution so that more Americans can get the shots they need to move us forward and away from this virus; \$2 billion that could be used to pay down some of our massive debt. There are so many positive uses for these funds that provide a real return for American taxpayers, but sending them to inmates isn't one of them. It is an unjustifiable expense that does nothing to fight COVID-19.

Today, I ask for full support of this body to strip this bad policy from law. We cannot forget that America is in a

debt crisis. I have been talking about it for a while, and I won't stop talking about it because it is a crisis my Democratic colleagues still don't seem to understand.

Right now, our Nation is headed toward \$30 trillion in debt. Think about that—\$30 trillion. The U.S. debt will be equal to \$240,000 per taxpayer. That is insane. And what are the Democrats doing to rein in this unsustainable debt? Absolutely nothing.

In fact, the Democrats' wasteful and untargeted spending bill, which will raise the debt from \$28 trillion to \$30 trillion contains loads of handouts and provisions, just like this one, that recklessly spend on their priorities unrelated to COVID.

That is why I sent a letter to the Biden administration on Monday, urging him to rescind hundreds of billions in waste from this bill and create a targeted approach Americans truly need.

It is clear that Democrats are living in a fantasy land where debt doesn't matter, spending has no consequences, and inflation is impossible. Of course, reasonable Americans know that is not true.

The Biden administration needs to take immediate action to request the rescission of the non-COVID-related, liberal agenda-driven, and wasteful funding found throughout this bill.

So I will keep fighting to cut down on this liberal wish list. Today, we can start that important work and pass my bill to not only save \$2 billion from going to inmates who have no need for the money, but also show the American people that Congress is committed to remaining fully accountable to the American people for the proper stewardship of tax dollars.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 798, introduced earlier today. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, today the Republicans are showing some real chutzpa.

On this issue, Republicans were for it before they were against it. Today, they claim to want to target prisoners. The real harm they are doing is to innocent children and families.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The junior Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, it is hard to imagine that my colleague just rose in opposition to this good bill.

Let's be clear. By objecting to this bill, Democrats are standing in full support of spending \$2 billion to send

\$1,400 checks to inmates. Democrats want to spend \$2 billion in taxpayer money to send checks to people in prison, convicted of committing serious crimes and victimizing their fellow Americans.

That means Democrats are saying that they want American taxpayers to be on the hook for \$1,400 checks to some of the most heinous criminals we have ever seen—people like Dylann Roof and the Parkland shooter.

How can anyone justify sending checks to these people? Let's remember, inmates don't pay income taxes. They have all their needs, food and medical expenses included, paid for by taxpayers. They don't do anything to stimulate our economy.

I do hope my colleague will reconsider his objection and stand with me in putting accountability to American taxpayers over this insane policy that does nothing but throw \$2 billion we don't have out the window.

Thank you, Madam President.

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

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

ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I wish you and I wish everyone a happy St. Patrick's Day. It is a big day for celebration up in Boston and all of Massachusetts and all across the country and the world. On St. Patrick's Day, everyone is Irish. So I wish everyone a happy St. Patrick's Day today.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Madam President, right now on the floor of the U.S. Senate is a reason not to be so happy, and that is why I look forward to very soon casting my vote to confirm Xavier Becerra to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, one of the most qualified and forward-thinking minds that will have ever run the Department of Health and Human Services.

But today, Republicans are using this confirmation vote to continue their agenda of obstruction, deflecting attention away from the nominee who will be the head of the chief Federal Agency responding to the coronavirus crisis—all to revive an unnecessary, blatantly political debate on reproductive rights. This ridiculous delay tactic only highlights how out of step with the American people the Senate Republicans are.

Their anti-choice, anti-woman, and anti-health rhetoric is on full display here on the Senate floor, and, sadly, it is not new. They want to roll back Roe v. Wade. They want to criminalize abortion care. They want the government to control women and their bodies. They want to roll back title IX protections for women on university

campuses and completely gut the title X program to fund critical healthcare providers like Planned Parenthood.

Republicans have put in place an anti-choice majority on the U.S. Supreme Court by confirming Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh and illegitimately filling Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's seat with Amy Coney Barrett. If there ever were a reason to abolish the filibuster, it is to ensure that we pass legislation to expand the Supreme Court so it cannot overturn Roe v. Wade and set us back decades in the fight for equal access to healthcare in our country.

But here today, the Republicans are attempting to disrupt the nomination of our Secretary of Health and Human Services with a craven political play to their base at the expense of the health of Americans. They would rather play politics than confirm President Biden's Cabinet nominees. They would rather remain beholden to the far-right's interest groups than do the work the American people sent us here to do.

For the past 4 years, the Trump administration emboldened these groups with dangerous rhetoric and far-right policies. But in November, how did the American people respond? They voted him out and gave the Democrats the Senate majority. Americans entrusted us to serve them, not fringe interest groups who want to turn back the clocks on healthcare and women's rights. That is why I stand on the floor of the U.S. Senate today to say abortion is healthcare.

We cannot stand for any more disparities, delays, or denials. More than ever in this country, we need to stand up and raise our voices against the Republican's work to restrict access to reproductive health services. We have a fight ahead of us—a fight to protect reproductive freedom, a fight to make sure that birth control is affordable and available, and a fight for title X to ensure that low-income patients receive quality family planning and reproductive health services.

Voters expect the Biden-Harris administration to take bold steps to protect and expand access to reproductive healthcare and freedoms, to ensure that every person has the fundamental right to make their own healthcare decisions, and they expect it because they want it.

Public support for Roe v. Wade is at a record high. Seventy-seven percent of Americans support that historic Supreme Court decision. That goes beyond a simple majority to an overwhelming consensus. A couple of years ago, one analysis of polling found that there is not a single State in the United States where a majority of voters support "making abortion illegal in all circumstances." The American people have moved past that debate that Republicans seem committed to resuscitating on the floor today. They are on the wrong side of history and the wrong side of the American people.

So as Republicans try to hijack this confirmation vote on Xavier Becerra,