

Affordable Care Act. Madam President, 500,000 Kentucky residents use ObamaCare—half a million people.

Last week an Associated Press article highlighted the fact that Kentucky has seen the largest drop in the percentage of its uninsured. I will read from an AP story:

Kentucky and Arkansas had the largest drops in the percentage of people without health insurance in the country, according to the Gallup-Healthways survey. In 2013, more than 20 percent of Kentuckians did not have health insurance. By the end of 2015, after the State expanded its Medicaid program and created a health-insurance exchange, that figure was down to 7.5 percent.

There it is in black and white. In 2013, 20 percent of Kentuckians didn't have health insurance, and now it is down to 7.5 percent. That is a remarkably strong decrease of the uninsured. If my friend the Republican leader had his way and repealed ObamaCare, all progress in Kentucky would be gone.

Sadly, Kentucky's tea party Governor is following in Senator McCONNELL's footsteps. Gov. Matt Bevin wants to tear apart his State's health exchange, regardless of the impact on his constituents. I will read again from the AP article:

Bevin, a Republican, has already given the order to dismantle Kynect, Kentucky's state-based exchange. And he plans to repeal Kentucky's Medicaid expansion and replace it with something else that [would] mean fewer people would be eligible and the ones who stay eligible would have to pay a small premium. Bevin needs approval from the federal government to do that. If he does not get it, Bevin has said he would repeal the expansion entirely.

It is time for Republicans to accept the fact that ObamaCare is here to stay. It is not going anyplace. Once and for all, it has moved past repeal. Start making the Affordable Care Act work even better for the American people.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I recently asked Secretary Burwell to come to the Senate to brief committee chairs, ranking members, and leaders in both parties on the administration's response to the Zika virus. I appreciate her team working with us to schedule that briefing for tomorrow. Here are the two areas in which we want to get a better understanding at the briefing:

No. 1, what preparations are being made to protect Americans?

No. 2, what are the administration's funding priorities given limited Federal resources?

Concern about the Zika virus is growing in our country, and protecting constituents, especially children, from a communicable disease is a high priority for all of us. I am looking forward to hearing more tomorrow about both

the administration's proposed response and its priorities for combatting this disease.

ENERGY POLICY MODERNIZATION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, the legislation currently before us—the Energy Policy Modernization Act—is the product of a year's worth of constructive and collaborative work. In the Energy Committee, it passed overwhelmingly with the support of both parties. Here on the floor, it has been subject to an open amendment process, with input from both sides. More than 30 amendments from both Democrats and Republicans have already been adopted. The Senator from Alaska recently sought consent to continue that progress by getting several more amendments pending. It is unclear why any colleague would object to her effort or why they would effectively block consideration of their own amendments, but that is what happened. It is disappointing for our country.

We are hoping our friends will reconsider. Remember, the Energy Policy Modernization Act is broad bipartisan legislation designed to help Americans produce more energy, pay less for energy, and save energy, all while helping strengthen our long-term national security. We should pass it.

I am asking colleagues to take yes for an answer and allow the open amendment process to continue so that we can pass it, which is so important to helping our country prepare for the energy demands of today and the energy opportunities of tomorrow.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam 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.

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

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

HEEDING HURRICANE WARNINGS

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, hurricanes can be deadly. We are accustomed to them in Florida. They are part of our lifestyle. We know enough about hurricanes and the ferociousness

and strength of Mother Nature to know that when a hurricane starts bearing down, you better be prepared, and that is especially so with regard to boats. Hurricanes cause giant-sized waves and strong winds that make it impossible to navigate a boat. So when the forecast calls for a hurricane, boats ought to get out of the way.

Sadly, last year the El Faro, a cargo vessel that sailed from Jacksonville to Puerto Rico and back, along with its sister ship, sailed right into a hurricane off the Bahamas. As a result, the last call to shore, although the captain's voice was calm, was to report that they had lost power and were therefore listing, which meant that something had been breached and water was coming into the ship. That was the last we heard from the captain. We now know that that ship is 5 miles below the surface of the Atlantic, on the eastern side of the Bahama Islands. Thirty-three people lost their lives, most of whom were from the Jacksonville, FL, area. The National Transportation Safety Board is conducting an investigation, and the question is whether or not they are going to put down another U.S. Navy submersible so they can continue their search for the recorder that would give them the complete data from the ship.

I am bringing this up again because the very same thing almost happened yesterday, only this time a 4,000-passenger cruise ship, sailing from the New York area to Port Canaveral, FL, and then on to other destinations in the Caribbean, sailed right into a hurricane that had winds topping 100 miles per hour.

I wish I had a blowup of the image of these hurricanes to show the Senate. Yesterday's storm was right off the coast of North and South Carolina. When these two images are compared side by side, we can see how yesterday's storm is similar to Hurricane Isabel. They look menacingly similar. The thing about yesterday's storm is that it was forecasted for days. So why in the world would a cruise ship with thousands of passengers on it go sailing right into it?

Some of the passengers have made comments, including Robert Huschka, executive editor of the Detroit Free Press, who was a passenger on the cruise. He said: "I am not going to lie. It was truly terrifying."

Passengers talked about how the water was coming into the upper decks. The pictures that were taken by the passengers on the ship speak for themselves. I am sure there was a courageous crew on board, but the question is: Why, after what happened to the El Faro last year, did it sail into the storm? Even if they were surprised by the change of the direction of the storm, which is what happened with the hurricane last year, why in the world would a ship go anywhere close to where the hurricane could be, particularly as the storm starts to cross the warm waters of the Gulf Stream,