

senators, his ability to turn votes in the chamber is uncertain and untested. Still, no one should ever count McConnell out -- he's among the savviest leaders Capitol Hill has seen.

WHAT AMERICA IS SEEING THIS MORNING -- SAN DIEGO UNION TRIBUNE:

"HEALTH BILL LOBBYING HEATS UP: Key GOP senator balks at current version; Trump, Democrats scramble to shore up allies before vote" <http://bit.ly/2t6oobU>

...**DENVER POST:** "Fifth GOP senator opposes latest health bill: Nevada's Heller worried by Medicaid cuts; Republican super PAC to attack him in ads"

<http://bit.ly/2tFmhHp> ...

... **HARTFORD COURANT:** "Senators Expect 'Titanic' Fight: Blumenthal, Murphy Blast 'Evil' Bill, GOP Secrecy" <http://bit.ly/2u0cRpj> ... **JANESVILLE GAZETTE:**

"Medicaid faces hard times: Historic change possible with GOP health plans"

<http://bit.ly/2sBNHzm>

STATEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT, FROM THE WHITE HOUSE --

@realdonaldtrump at 8:51 a.m.: "Democrats slam GOP healthcare proposal as Obamacare premiums & deductibles increase by over 100%. Remember keep your doctor, keep your plan?"

-- **GUESS WHAT:** Democrats were never going to vote to repeal Obamacare. The stalemate on health care is a GOP issue. If you talk to elected Republicans on the Hill, they pretty much all understand that they now own health care as a political issue.

THE HEADACHE MCCONNELL DOESN'T NEED -- "The surprising GOP holdout

on the Senate's health bill," by Jen Haberkorn: "Ron Johnson stormed Washington in 2010 by railing against Obamacare, becoming one of the law's harshest and most persistent critics. Now, with the Senate on the brink of repealing the law, he's one of the surprise holdouts threatening to block the bill. The Wisconsin Republican says Senate leaders are rushing the vote before he and the public can analyze it and are not doing enough to actually bring down premiums. He joined with a trio of Senate conservatives on Thursday who say they're open to negotiation but can't support Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's bill as it is." <http://politi.co/2u0cOdd>

-- **FROM WAPO'S SEAN SULLIVAN, BOB COSTA AND KELSEY SNELL:** "As the vote-counting effort intensifies, Trump, who has said he supports the bill but it needs more 'negotiation,' is trying to build consensus both in public and behind the scenes. On Thursday, he called Sen. Ted Cruz (Tex.), one of the five GOP holdouts, to speak

with him about his proposed changes, according to White House officials and a Trump ally with knowledge of the conversation." <http://wapo.st/2sMHSh6>

AIR WARS -- "Pro-Trump group to target GOP Sen. Heller over health care bill," by Matt Nussbaum and Alex Isenstadt: "A pro-Trump outside group is launching an advertising blitz against Republican Sen. Dean Heller over his opposition to the health care repeal bill - a bold act of political retaliation against a member of the president's own party. Heller, a Nevada Republican, is up for re-election in 2018 and is seen as one of the most vulnerable incumbents up for reelection this cycle. The barrage, which will be orchestrated by America First Policies, a group run by many of President Donald Trump's top campaign advisers, is backed by more than a million dollars ... Digital ads [were] set to begin running on Friday, and television and radio spots are set to launch early next week." <http://politi.co/2t6bZDi>

-- **THIS IS STUNNING.** Heller is perhaps the most embattled Senate Republican in 2018. A group that VP Mike Pence raised money for is going after him. This is the kind of thing that is going to have Senate Republicans wondering if the White House and its allies have any idea what they're doing.

-- **@HillaryClinton:** "Forget death panels. If Republicans pass this bill, they're the death party."

***** **A message from Starbucks:** One in eight Americans struggles to get enough to eat. Inspired by the commitment from our partners (employees), Starbucks is working with Feeding America to channel our unsold fresh food to feed the communities we serve. By 2020, as our FoodShare program grows, we'll donate 50 million meals each year: <http://sbux.co/2sBiWeM> *****

WHAT REX TILLERSON'S BEEN UP TO -- "Overruling diplomats, U.S. to drop Iraq, Myanmar from child soldiers' list," by Reuters' Jason Szep and Matt Spetalnick: "In a highly unusual intervention, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson plans to remove Iraq and Myanmar from a U.S. list of the world's worst offenders in the use of child soldiers, disregarding the recommendations of State Department experts and senior U.S. diplomats, U.S. officials said. The decision, confirmed by three U.S. officials, would break with longstanding protocol at the State Department over how to identify offending countries and could prompt accusations the Trump administration is prioritizing security and diplomatic interests ahead of human rights.