

been requested. It is oversubscribed by a factor of five.

We can see on this chart that \$93 billion has been requested; \$18.5 billion available. The others—the renewable, nuclear, fossil, mix—when you look at what we had intended with the Loan Guarantee Program and how we envisioned that would move forward, I think we can clearly underestimate where that support would be for the nuclear programs.

It is important to note that the Loan Guarantee Program is also entirely self-funded and does not represent a handout to the industry and does not expose the taxpayer to default risks. The total loan volume for the program is established by the Appropriations Committee, but any potential defaults are covered by fees paid by the applicants, not by the taxpayer. So the industry does get the help, the assistance—that backstop, if you will—of the loan guarantee from the Federal Government, but they pay for it. That seems reasonable.

During debate on the stimulus bill, there was a \$50 billion increase in the size of the Loan Guarantee Program that was sought. Again, this is a \$42 billion program with \$120 billion in application requests. But increasing the size of the program authority was shot down several months back because of fears that construction of new nuclear plants would take up the bulk of the loan guarantee authority. So where was the administration's support for the Loan Guarantee Program during this debate? This program helps all forms of clean energy technologies, but this increase was denied because nuclear was in the mix.

For 10 years now, we have consistently heard about the urgency of global climate change and the need to address it. I agree. There is clearly evidence of climate change. I see the real-life impacts in my State of Alaska. But I do find it more than a little bit inconsistent that the same entities that would press for immediate action would deny nuclear a role in the solution.

Perhaps the current administration thinks global climate change isn't as important as developing a centrally planned electrical system based on renewable energy that the administration believes is in the best interest of the public. Renewable energy sources will be important and deserve solid support, but, as you can see from this chart—and I apologize because it is very busy—we could double the amount of electricity produced by renewable resources and it still wouldn't equal what we currently receive from nuclear power.

So if you look at our nuclear electric power, 100 percent of nuclear power goes to generation of electricity; 21 percent of the sector creates our electric power here. Looking up to renewable energy and how it feeds into consumption, whether it is transportation, industrial, residential and commercial,

or electric, if we were to increase—double—our renewable energy, again we still don't come close to what we are able to provide currently with nuclear.

So going back to the issue of climate change, I believe it is important to ask the question as to whether this issue of climate change can really wait for renewables to develop to such a scale that they will become the primary source of energy. The point I wish to leave folks with is that we need to be advancing all technologies equitably.

Nuclear energy is the most robust form of nonemitting base load power we have available to us, bar none. Over the last 20 years, the industry has demonstrated its ability to operate these reactors efficiently and safely to the great benefit of our country.

Mr. President, I mentioned it earlier. The rest of the world gets it, the American public gets it, but where is the administration on nuclear? The time to demonstrate our resolve for new nuclear energy development is now. We as a nation cannot afford additional delay if we are truly serious about how we reduce our carbon emissions while maintaining access to affordable energy.

It is time for the administration to come forward with its plan for the inclusion of nuclear power in its overall energy policy and what it intends to do with existing and future spent nuclear fuel. We shouldn't be left standing here asking: Where is nuclear?

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Delaware.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, do I understand that the time for morning business expires at 3 o'clock?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. That is correct.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to extend that for an extra 10 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, while my colleague from Alaska is still in the Chamber, let me bring her some good news, as one on our side who is a strong advocate for nuclear power and who believes it is incredibly important that we do it safely. I chair the Senate Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety, and, as she mentioned, we have now, I think, 17 applications to build 26 new nuclear powerplants. I think we have \$18 billion in loan guarantees.

One of the things we have done this year is we have taken off the time restriction on the loan guarantees so they can go beyond the next couple of years, if needed. Hopefully, they won't be needed, but at least the amount of money will be there and available for a number of years.

Another piece we had put in the stimulus package was a provision that

says that not only can renewables—solar, wind, geothermal, and all the rest—be able to participate in the manufacturing tax credits to create—if you will, manufacture—the components of solar, wind, geothermal, but also nuclear. If we are going to build 26, 27 new nuclear powerplants in the next decade or two, I sure don't want to be getting the components from China, South Korea, Japan, or someplace in Europe. We should get the components from manufacturers that are here, and part of the stimulus package has been designed to do that.

The other thing I would mention regarding cap and trade on climate change, if we actually take that approach—and my hope is we will—just by its very nature, being a producer of electricity but not one that creates carbon dioxide, money will flow in the cap-and-trade approach to utilities which use nuclear energy, which will develop more nuclear energy.

So I appreciate the concerns the Senator from Alaska raises.

I might add that just 3 weeks ago, I hosted a roundtable at MIT, near Boston, and we brought to the table some of the smartest people around—from MIT and from Harvard—who focused a lot on spent nuclear fuel and what to do with it. As you know, a lot of the fuel rods, I am told, still have 80 or 90 percent of the energy in the spent fuel rods. One of the questions I asked was, What should we do about it? Yucca Mountain is on hold for now. And I was pleasantly surprised to hear a unanimous opinion from everybody there who said, for now, maybe for the next 30, 40, 50, 60 years, even longer, the spent fuel rods, which are stored on site with our nuclear powerplants in dry cask storage, are perfectly adequate in terms of providing security and safekeeping for the spent fuel.

In the meantime—and I would hope the Senator would join those of us who are advocates of nuclear power, would also understand we need to address the spent fuel issue, and would work with us to help fund technology for reprocessing and recycling to make sure we don't wait 50 or 60 years to do that but we get started a lot sooner.

So it is not all gloom and doom, but I appreciate the concerns the Senator from Alaska has raised and very much look forward to working with her on these issues, as we do on so many others, hopefully to good effect, and I thank her.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN CODEL

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I missed you in Afghanistan/Pakistan. I understand you and another CODEL were there at the same time we were, and I think we missed you by a day or so in both countries. I don't presume to speak for you or for those in your CODEL. We had five in ours. Senator MARK UDALL, Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN, Senator KAY HAGAN, Senator MARK BEGICH of Alaska, and I was privileged to be a part of that delegation.

We had 2 days in Afghanistan and 2 days in Pakistan. We left Lahore, a large city in the eastern part of the country, about 2 days before they had the assault that killed 30 or so people, a terrorist assault.

I wish to take a couple of minutes, if I could, today. We could almost take turns here. I understand you can't speak from the podium about your congressional delegation, but if we could, we could probably have quite a good conversation.

There is a reason they call Afghanistan the graveyard for empires, because for a long time empires have been going there and trying to subdue the Afghans—the Brits among them, the Soviet Union among them—and not with great success. When the Afghans sort of thrust the Soviet Union out from their country, with our support, we promptly left. As we left, we left a vacuum in Afghanistan, and we left a vacuum which was filled all too readily by the Taliban, and providing a sanctuary for al-Qaida.

On the heels of 9/11, we decided to go back and clean the place out, drove the Taliban out of there, and a bunch of them took refuge over in the mountainous areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Once we had done that, we took our eye off the ball. We decided to go into Iraq and made that country take down their regime—Saddam Hussein's regime—and we transferred a lot of our troops and treasure and attention to Iraq and took our eye off the ball in Afghanistan. Into that vacuum we left came—not surprisingly—the Taliban to resume their ways of before. They are especially plentiful in the southern part of the state.

As we were preparing to leave Afghanistan and head for Pakistan, we did a series of press interviews, radio and print interviews, from that country. Among the questions that were asked of our congressional delegation were: What is the exit strategy? What is your exit strategy from Afghanistan? I responded that I think the exit strategy is our new strategy.

The reporters said: Why is that?

I said: Well, let me take a minute to talk about that new strategy. It is not just about sending 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan, a little more than half of which are marines, and some of those are being redeployed from Iraq, and some are to be brought in fresh from the United States. But, I said, if all we did was put another 17,000 or 27,000 troops in Afghanistan, that is not going to be the answer to success. It is not going to be what we need to do.

In addition to the 17,000 troops who are being committed in a buildup that will occur over the next 3 months or so, we are bringing in about 150 additional helicopters to move around where the Taliban is and track them down and hopefully eliminate their presence in that country. But even that is not enough force at this juncture.

The other thing that is called for in our strategy is to bring in about 4,000

trainers. These trainers are to go along with the men and women, the American troops who are embedded and mentoring Afghan units already—4,000 new trainers. Their job really is twofold: one, to help not just to stand up the Afghan army—and the Afghan army is a good fighting force. They are not big enough, given the size of their country and all the people who live there.

I don't know if this is the experience of the Presiding Officer, but we met with a number of American troops who had been in Iraq and were now in Afghanistan, and I said: What is the difference in terms of the fighting force—what you saw in Iraq and what you are seeing in Afghanistan?

They said: Well, there were times when we almost had to coax the Iraqis out of their barracks and try to cajole them into taking the lead on operations. We don't have to do that with the Afghans. These guys are ferocious fighters.

That is why they are known as the graveyard for empires and drove out the Brits and the Soviets with our help.

We want to help the Afghans double the size of their army and improve the quality. We want to help them double the size of their police force and improve dramatically the quality.

The Afghans have a whole lot of respect for their army. They do not have the same level of respect for the police force. As the Presiding Officer knows, the country is rampant with corruption. The corruption includes the police. It is not uncommon for police to take bribes, to almost solicit or command money from others in their country. As a result, it is maybe less effective as a force, certainly less respected as a force.

One of the smartest things done this year is the salaries of the police officers have been raised by a factor of four—quadrupled—putting them pretty much on parity with the salaries paid to the army, taking away the need for those police officers who feel they need to supplement their income by bribing or accepting bribes from folks.

One of the questions that was asked as I did that press interview was: What surprised you about what you saw in Afghanistan?

I said: Well, a number of things. I didn't realize this was a country that as recently as the 1970s was able to feed itself, and not just feed itself but to feed a number of other nations in that part of the world.

This is a country that is able to raise fruits, has vegetables and orchards, they can raise wheat, they can raise cotton and saffron, and they can raise chickens—some of the same things we raise in each of our States, as the Presiding Officer knows. Currently, though, for the most part, what they raise is poppies. They raise the poppies to feed the opium trade, and they use the opium to make heroin. Most of the heroin in the world, literally and figuratively, has its root in Afghanistan.

The production of poppies peaked in 2007. It began coming down in 2008. We want to continue to drive it down in 2009, again in 2010 and 2011, until we get to the point where there are no poppies being grown in Afghanistan and where the farmers are able to feed themselves and to make a good living raising and selling fruits and vegetables in their country and for neighboring countries, and to be able to do the same kind of thing with the wheat they raise and the other commodities they raise too. It is not unrealistic. Our troops cannot go in and tell them how to do that, but it turns out there is a component of our strategy that calls for a significant civilian component. What we are going to see is people going into Afghanistan—our folks in many cases, sometimes our NATO allies—who are specialists in agriculture, helping the Afghan farmers diversify away from poppies and toward other commodities which will enable them to feed themselves and to feed their country. It is a smart strategy.

That isn't all, though. Going back to the question of what surprised me, I was surprised to learn about those big mountains, big snow-capped mountains—they are quite beautiful—in that there are a lot of minerals and there is a potential for a very successful mining and mineral industry in Afghanistan. They need a little help figuring out how to get it going and figuring out how to transport the minerals they mine, but there is money to be made there for that country.

Also, I didn't realize they have oil and gas deposits in Afghanistan. I certainly didn't realize they found, about a year ago, they have three times more oil and gas holdings beneath the surface of the Earth and in those mountains more than was originally believed to be the case. We have all seen pictures of Afghanistan. I was a naval flight officer, going through my training earlier in my career in Corpus Christi, the area of south Texas toward Brownsville. Afghanistan reminds me of that except it has these huge mountains that pop up all over the place. But the mountains give them a great opportunity for producing wind power. Just as we have windmills on the tops of mountains in this country, the wind blows a whole lot in Afghanistan. They can do themselves well by harnessing that wind and turning it into electricity. They have vast expanses of lands that would lend themselves to solar energy panels, and they also have rivers that could be harnessed and used to create energy as well, hydroelectric energy.

There are a number of sources—oil, gas, wind power, solar, hydroelectric power—that could help this country meet its needs and maybe even export some of that electricity to the other countries in the region. Those are things that surprised me that I did not fully expect to see.

What also surprised me was the level of corruption, the extent of the corruption. It is endemic in that country.

They have not much experience or time governing themselves, 5 years or so experience with democracy. Here in the United States we have been working on democracy for how long? Over 220 years. We still struggle with it. We should not be surprised that a country that has had maybe 5 years of experience with democracy is struggling with it as well. They need help figuring out how to govern at the national level; they need help figuring out how to govern at the provincial level; and they need help figuring out how to govern at the local level. Part of what our civilian component will do there is to help, really, like Self-Government 101, them figure out how to govern more effectively, govern more honestly, and ferret out corruption where it exists.

One of the most encouraging conversations I had was at Ambassador Eikenberry's residence. Right across from me at the table was a fellow I called the Secretary of Finance. He was really the Minister of Finance, like our Treasury Secretary in this country. We talked about corruption. It was a very frank discussion.

He said, basically I am ashamed of what goes on in this country. He said, in my ministry, the Ministry of Finance, we basically set, last month—in April at the time—zero tolerance. We are not going to put up with it anymore. The idea that people skim revenues coming in to the government, we don't even have enough to make ends meet, even to come close. He said, on my watch, in my ministry, in my department, we are going to get rid of that. If people want to do that, they are not going to work with me.

That is the kind of leader we need in every ministry. That is the kind of leader we need in the whole country. As they go to the polls, I think in August, to elect a President, they have a number of people who are running. I hope whatever flows from that will include a leader who will provide the right kind of personal example, calling on the government that he leads to lead by example and to ferret out corruption where it exists.

Let me take a minute or two on Pakistan, if I could. I had not been to Pakistan either. In the weeks before we arrived there, in fact the months before we arrived, the Taliban, who were already pretty well entrenched in the territories up along the border of Afghanistan, began reaching out tentacles and spreading their influence to other parts of the country that in ways I found alarming. I know many people in this country saw the expansion of Taliban influence in Pakistan as something to be concerned about. Here is a country with about 100 nuclear warheads with the Taliban less than 100 miles from their capital of Islamabad. That got my attention and caused me a fair amount of concern; not just me but others in our delegation, in our Senate and Congress and in the administration.

Something happened a couple of weeks before we got there that helped

turn that situation around. The Government of Pakistan was following what I will call almost a policy of appeasement with the Taliban, trying to get the Taliban to play nice, stay in their place, if you will, and leave the rest of the country alone, a policy of appeasement that allowed the Taliban to begin to exert its influence in places where it had previously not done so. As they extended their influence and presence, the Taliban sought to replace the regular law and order of the country, the laws of the provinces and the National Government with Islamic law. One incident occurred a month or so ago which has done maybe more to change this picture than anything I can think of. It was rather remarkable.

In one of the areas where Islamic law had replaced the traditional law of the community, the father of a young woman insisted that she marry a man she didn't want to marry. Apparently under Islamic law—I don't pretend to be an expert, but under Islamic law apparently that is what fathers can do with their daughters, tell them who to marry. She didn't want to have any part of that, and made it clear to him and to others. She ended up being publicly flogged in the streets of her community by the Taliban, in a flogging that was not just witnessed by a number of people but it was videotaped. That videotape ended up being played hundreds of times on every television station in Pakistan and on the Internet. Anybody who wanted to watch it or didn't want to watch it had the opportunity to do so.

About the same time one of the Taliban leaders gave a major address in Pakistan and showed their true colors, what they were about if they gained the upper hand in Pakistan.

The people of that country, including the military, the political leadership, multiparty—the rank and file and the military basically stood up as one and said that is not where we want to go as a country. That is not the Pakistan that we want. We don't want to have any part of seeing that kind of change occur to our country, and they turned on the Taliban.

In the days the Presiding Officer and I were there, our CODELs were there, we met with the military and political leadership of the country—I am sure his delegation did—and I was very much heartened by the forcefulness with which they are going after the very people they appeared to be almost appeasing in the months before. They are determined to wipe them out, to crush them, and to be able to live their lives and govern their country in a way that I think more of us would want any country to be able to govern itself.

I came back and, I say to my colleagues—I came back not wearing rose-colored glasses. I did not change my name to Pollyanna. I realize the fighting that lies ahead, especially in Afghanistan as we stand up our 17,000 troops, roughly 10,000 marines, and bring in all those helicopters and train-

ers. We are going to take up the Taliban in the southern part of the country, in Kandahar, in Helmand Province. That is where they raise all the poppies for the drug trade. That puts money in the pockets of farmers. It also puts money in the pockets of the Taliban and other terrorists, not only in that country but other countries as well. We do not need that. The people in Afghanistan and Pakistan don't need that either. One of the advantages of getting rid of the poppy trade and replacing it with fruits and vegetables and chickens and wheat, and so forth, is we stop supporting in a financial way the terrorists wreaking such havoc over there.

But there is going to be a lot of tough fighting in the weeks that lie ahead as we raise our profile, as we raise our ability to deliver a punch. We are going to be there training our Afghan colleagues, both at the military level, the army, and at the police level. Ultimately, while we help them to stand up and strengthen themselves in the next 3 to 5 years, we have sown the seeds of an exit strategy that will enable us to draw down and eventually pull most of the fighting forces out of there—perhaps leave behind a residual to help lead the training effort as many of our NATO allies are helping with the training effort.

Let me close with this. One of the other things I learned when I was over there, I was surprised to find out how many other countries are involved. We have the major part of the fighting force. There are a lot of other nations involved. I am sure my colleague, who is presiding, saw that too. One of the things that surprised me was the Japanese, who have no trainers there, no fighting forces there—I don't know that they have a civilian component there—but they are paying the salary of the police force for the whole country for the next 6 months. It is about \$100 million, a substantial contribution. It is an example of what others can do to help. We hope those who are helping will do more of the same and those who are not will find ways to be supportive.

The operations today and in the months ahead will be military led with a civilian component. Eventually it will transform and we will have a force led by the civilians, and the military will be a smaller part of what we do in Afghanistan.

That is about it. I look forward to coming back and maybe presiding when the Presiding Officer shares what he saw and learned as well. But I look forward to working with him and those who accompanied him on his delegation trip, and those who went with us, as we help the Afghans and Pakistanis take on a tough enemy in a fight that can be won and should be won.

With that, I see no one seeking to speak so I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 4:15 p.m.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CRAIG THOMAS RURAL HOSPITAL AND PROVIDER EQUITY ACT

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, it will come as no surprise to many that rural health care issues are near and dear to my heart. Prior to my service in the Senate, I practiced medicine in Casper, WY, for almost a quarter of a century. I have firsthand knowledge of the obstacles families face in obtaining medical care throughout rural America. I also understand the challenges hospitals and providers must overcome in delivering quality care to families in remote areas with limited resources.

To give a snapshot of Wyoming's health care landscape, we have only 26 hospitals spread over nearly 100,000 square miles. With vast distances, complex medical cases, and increased demand for technology and advanced medical care, the rural health care delivery system is not a one-size-fits-all system. I have fought, and will continue to fight each and every day, to protect Wyoming's hospitals, providers, and the patients they serve. This is one of my top legislative priorities. That is why I am an active member of the Senate rural health caucus. For decades the caucus has built a reputation of bipartisan and bicameral collaboration and cooperation. Each Congress we come together to design rural and frontier-specific health care legislation. These efforts have produced incredible results.

For example, when Congress enacted the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, it included a comprehensive health care package specifically tailored with rural communities, rural hospitals, and rural providers in mind. The Medicare Modernization Act finally put rural providers on a level playing field with other doctors and hospitals across the country.

In Wyoming, that meant hospitals in Worland, Lander, and Torrington could keep their doors open and serve patients as close to home as possible. With the passage of that act, Congress put into place commonsense Medicare

payment equity provisions critical to maintaining access to quality health care in isolated and underserved areas. Rural and frontier America achieved a significant victory. There was much to celebrate. But the mission is not complete. Several of the act's rural health provisions have expired, and many are set to expire soon.

That brings us to the Craig Thomas Rural Hospital and Provider Equity Act or R-HoPE. I have joined Senators CONRAD, ROBERTS, and HARKIN in introducing a comprehensive rural health care bill. The legislation is titled the "Craig Thomas Rural Hospital and Provider Equity Act." This bill reauthorizes expiring rural provisions included in the Medicare Modernization Act. It also takes additional steps to address inequities in the Medicare payment system. These inequities continually place rural providers at a disadvantage.

But there are additional challenges. We have a great need for adequate outpatient reimbursement in smaller towns, towns such as Rawlins, Kemmerer, and Laramie. Rural hospitals such as these are more dependent on Medicare payments as part of their total revenue. In fact, Medicare accounts for approximately 70 percent of total revenue for small rural hospitals. Rural hospitals have lower patient volumes. But these same hospitals must compete nationally to recruit doctors and nurses. This is due to an alarming shortage of nurses and other health care professionals across the country. Additional burdens are placed on these hospitals and providers due to higher rates of uninsured and underinsured patients who live in rural areas. Also, seniors living in rural areas have more financial needs and have increased rates of chronic disease. This legislation would preserve achievements in the Medicare Modernization Act and give much needed relief to rural doctors, nurses, and hospitals.

First, this bill equalizes payments that are known as Medicare disproportionate share hospital payments. These are payments that help hospitals cover the extra costs associated with serving a high proportion of low-income and uninsured patients. It is time we bring rural hospital payments in line with the benefits big city hospitals receive when they are providing medical care to the uninsured.

Second, the bill recognizes that low-volume hospitals do have a higher cost per case, which further puts Wyoming's similar hospitals in the red. This bill would give these unique rural hospitals extra payments, payments that will give Wyoming's low-volume hospitals the resources to continue to provide high-quality, lifesaving medical care. There are several hospitals in my State located in Laramie, Rawlins, Kemmerer, and Lander that need this critical provision.

In addition to the Medicare hospital payment provision, this bill also

strengthens over 3,500 rural health clinics across the country. Many of these communities depend on these clinics for important preventive health care. Currently, rural health clinics receive an all-inclusive capped payment rate that has not been adjusted, except for inflation, since 1988. That is 21 years. So to recognize the rising cost of health care, this measure would raise the rural health clinic cap from \$72 to \$92. This increase makes it comparable to the reimbursement urban community health centers currently receive.

Since every small town cannot support a full-service hospital, rural health clinics are a key component to deliver medical care all across Wyoming. To see how critical this program is, all we have to do is visit two towns in northeastern Wyoming: Moorcroft, a population of 807; and Hulett, population of 434. Residents in these ranching and mining towns depend on their rural health clinics to receive primary medical care as close to home as possible.

Finally, the legislation would help rural areas maintain important emergency medical services. Rural EMS providers are primarily volunteers. They have difficulty recruiting, difficulty retaining, and spend additional time educating EMS personnel. These volunteers have day jobs as farmers, ranchers, teachers, and lawyers. They volunteer because the community needs their help.

Not all Wyoming cities and towns have the resources to pay for this service. Even less have the means to buy and upgrade essential lifesaving equipment. This legislation will allow ambulance providers to collect payments for transporting patients to the hospital after they answer a 911 call—regardless of the final diagnosis of the patient.

Wyoming is blessed with pristine landscapes. These landscapes, though, also present significant challenges. Longer distances, bad weather, and other challenges make obtaining and providing quality health care often difficult. Our unique circumstances require us to work together to share resources and to develop networks.

I believe the Federal Government must continue to recognize the important differences between urban and rural health care and respond with appropriate policy. Washington must remember that one payment system does not fit all. Rural providers provide care for their patients under circumstances much different than their urban counterparts.

This legislation is designed to make sure rural hospitals, rural clinics, rural ambulance providers, rural home health agencies, rural mental health providers, rural doctors, and other critical health clinicians are paid accurately and fairly.

I strongly encourage my colleagues with an interest in rural health to co-sponsor this legislation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.