

no incentives for efficiency and, in fact, encourages higher costs and overutilization of services. As a consequence, Medicare costs are rising in excess of 10 percent a year, while private health spending is growing at less than half that rate.

There continues to be gaps in Medicare coverage. Medicare generally does not pay for preventive care and beneficiaries do not have access to benefits like prescription drugs that are routinely provided through private health plans. Many Medicare beneficiaries would gladly elect to trade their current fee-for-service coverage for a more coordinated system of care that gives them expanded coverage for prescription drugs and other benefits they currently do not enjoy.

Americans in the private health care system generally have some choice about the kind of health plan they are enrolled in. Most Medicare beneficiaries do not. Congress should consider giving Medicare beneficiaries a full range of choice of health care plans, with incentives for beneficiaries to choose cost-efficient coverage.

We should also consider allowing people to stay in their employer's health plan when they turn 65, even after they have retired. Medicare could reimburse employers for the cost of the premiums and perhaps provide a tax break as an additional incentive for them to continue coverage. This would not only allow Medicare beneficiaries to remain in a health plan they are comfortable with, but it would also keep them in a pool with younger, healthier people to lower the cost of their coverage.

And, finally, we must rid Medicare of the fraud and abuse that robs the program of as much as \$18 billion a year. Medicare has become a prime target for opportunists who bilk the system by overbilling, unbundling services, and doublebilling. I have introduced legislation for the past 2 years to crack down on fraud and abuse, and it is time to pass these reforms.

There are no easy answers—either substantively or politically—to Medicare's financial problems in either the short or long term. If we are to summon the political will to overcome the current crisis and revitalize Medicare to meet the needs of the future generations, we must abandon the politics of fear and take up the politics of trust.

This should not be a partisan issue. Those who hold a fiduciary duty to oversee the Medicare system say that immediate action is necessary, and the President apparently agrees. Given the sheer magnitude of the financing shortfall, bipartisan cooperation is essential if we are to establish the kind of lasting reforms that will be necessary to keep the promise of Medicare for not just current but future generations.

Mr. REID addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the time for morning business be extended so that the order would be that Senator DORGAN will speak 15 minutes, I will speak for 15 minutes, and Senator WELLSTONE will speak for 10 minutes.

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

The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

MEDICARE

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, last week during debate on the defense authorization bill, I came to the floor to point out that someone on the Armed Services Committee had written into the bill a special little deal that no one had asked for. It was \$60 million to buy blimps. Yes, blimps. Airbags. Airships. I asked the question, Who wrote this in? Who wants to buy blimps? Who decides that the *Hindenburg* is important for America's defense?

I did not find out who did it, but there were no hearings, no disclosure—they just wrote in \$60 million to buy blimps. Now I discover that hot airbags are not limited necessarily to the Defense Department authorization bill.

I have listened this morning to a substantial amount of discussion about Medicare. I will tell you, some of it really surprises me.

Let me talk first about the issue of Medicare going broke. We were treated this morning to a half dozen folks who say: "Did you know that Medicare is going to go bankrupt in 7 years? We Republicans called the Medicare trustees up to the Capitol for a special meeting because we were so concerned about their report." And the President is not concerned, they say. He does not care. "But we are concerned, so we called the trustees up here to the Capitol and had a visit, because we Republicans care." I will bet you that I am safe in saying this is the only meeting of trustees the other side has ever had in this Capitol.

Well, here is a list of the trustees' reports for the last 15 years. Every single year since 1979, save two—in fact, 23 out of 25 years—the boards of trustees have sent a report to this Capitol and this Senate telling us when the Medicare system is going to run out of money.

In 1982, while Ronald Reagan was President, the trustees sent a report up to the Capitol that said in 1987 Medicare is going to be insolvent. In 1986, they sent up a report that said in 1996 it is going to be broke. The list goes on. That is in 23 out of 25 years.

Why have the Republicans invented this as a crisis when 23 out of 25 reports have described the time when Medicare is going to become insolvent? Every time this happens, Congress makes adjustments to make sure that Medicare will not go broke.

Why have the Republicans decided to invent this as a crisis? It is because the Republicans, under the guise of a budget they say will be balanced, also wanted to put up the center tent pole in this giant tent called the Contract With America. What is that center pole? It is a tax cut for their wealthy friends—a \$245 billion tax cut, 80 percent of which will go to those taxpayers with incomes over \$100,000 a year.

Now, how do you pay for a tax cut? How do you pay for a tax cut if you are up to your neck in debt and have all kinds of budget problems? You take a look at another big part of the Federal budget and say, let us cut that in order to make room for our tax cut. Ergo, they have proposed \$270 billion in cuts to Medicare in order to accommodate a similar sized proposal to cut taxes, the bulk of which goes to the wealthiest Americans.

Those are the facts. There is no one in this body who does not want to make sure that Medicare exists for the long term. So to those who came out here this morning with a hot iron and ironing board trying to iron out the President on this issue because, somehow, the Democrats do not believe in Medicare, I say, just look at the record. The first time Medicare was on the floor of the Senate was in August 1960, and 97 percent of the Republicans voted against it. Democrats helped create Medicare, and I am proud of it. When we enacted Medicare, less than half of America's elderly had health insurance coverage. Now 97 percent do. I am proud of that.

Are there some problems with Medicare? Yes, there are. America is graying and getting older. Each month, over 200,000 more Americans become eligible for Medicare because they reach retirement age. That puts a strain on the system. So we have to continue to make adjustments to make Medicare solvent.

For people to come to this floor and suggest that somehow the Democrats are the problem and the Republicans are going to save Medicare, I am sorry, but this is just at odds with the facts. The fact is that Democrats helped create Medicare.

There is an old saying that "the lion and the lamb might lay down together, but the lamb ain't going to get much sleep." I would observe, after what I heard this morning, that the Republicans and Medicare might lay down together as well, but I do not think Medicare is going to get much sleep either. The fact is, we must make Medicare solvent for the long-term, and we will. But we must not ever decide to go to the health care portion of the Federal budget and try to find massive Medicare savings that will result in higher Medicare costs for older Americans and reduced access to health care for senior citizens, in order to accommodate a big tax cut mostly for the wealthy.

Now, I know that those who are out here spinning this morning like a ball of yarn were accusing the other side of

spinning on Medicare. Well, you do not have to spin at all to simply open the budget proposals and find out who gets what. The budget proposals are simple. The budget plan provides for a very significant tax cut, going largely to the most affluent Americans, and it provides for by far the largest cut in Medicare expenditures in the history of this program.

We have had speakers say the cuts in Medicare are simply a cut in the rate of growth. If you have more and more seniors becoming eligible for Medicare, then the size of the program increases. If health care—not only for Medicare recipients but for all Americans—increases in price every year, and it does, then that increases the cost of the program.

Now, if you have those two facts—more elderly being covered by Medicare and higher health care prices—and you say we are not going to pay, we are going to cut way back, what that means is that those senior citizens who rely on Medicare will pay higher prices and get less care. I do not think there is any question about that.

They talk about experts. Most of the experts look at the numbers and say, "Yes, it is true we will spend more on Medicare, but we will still not meet the needs of older Americans because there is a graying of America" and because health care costs are going to continue to increase.

The fact is that what the Federal Government will spend is not going to meet the needs and the result will be that the elderly will receive less health care and pay more for it. That is just a fact.

Now, my own view of Medicare is, I suppose, fashioned at least in part by where I grew up. I grew up in a town of 300 people. There are a lot of elderly folks in my hometown. I saw a lot of folks when I was a teenager who reached the end of their lives and did not have anything—no money, no assets—who worried, who lived in desperate fear that they would get ill and would not have the ability to afford health care.

I saw that, as did most other people. It is nice to know that today, at least, most of those people do not live in that kind of fear because Medicare helps them. Medicare helps provide for them.

I had a woman in my home county, whom I told the Senate about some while ago, who showed up at a town meeting, stood up and said, "I have new knees, a new hip, and I had cataract surgery. I am 75 years old and feel like a million bucks." What a remarkable thing. Fifty years ago she would not have had new knees and a new hip, and she would have been in a wheelchair. If she came to the meeting, she would not have been able to see me.

With the breathtaking achievements in medical care, plus the program called Medicare, this woman has a good life. At age 75, she tells us she feels like a million dollars.

I am enormously proud of what we have done. I think what is important

as we talk about reform these days is that we not start to take apart the things that make this country good. I am perfectly willing to sit down with anybody in this Chamber and say, "All right, we will decide to work on this particular issue. We will make sure that Medicare is solvent for the long term."

We have done that before. We will always do that. We will always make adjustments to make Medicare financially sound. Mr. President, 23 of 25 trustees' reports in the last 25 years have described a date by which insolvency would occur, and we made adjustments and stretched that out.

I am willing to do that. But I am unwilling, under any conditions, to join hands with those who say, "Let's make room for a big tax cut." Yes, we are up to our neck in debt. We want to build Star Wars. Yes, we want to go out and buy blimps, but then make room for a big tax cut. How do we pay for that?

There is an easy way: Take it out of Medicare and Medicaid over here and invent something that you want to foist upon the American people as new—a trustees' report that says Medicare will be insolvent.

If this truly was new, then I suppose I could understand their angst. But the fact is, they have had 25 trustees' reports in 25 years and 23 of those have said Medicare is going to have an insolvent period. Yet they have never had a meeting of the trustees until this year, when they began to spin their ball of yarn about saving Medicare.

If the folks who want to give a tax cut to the rich believe older Americans will swallow the minnow that they are the ones who will save Medicare, after they have proposed big Medicare cuts in order to accommodate their tax cut for the wealthy, well, then, excuse me, but I guess I am somehow naive about the art of spending.

Perhaps they are much better, much more clever, much more artful than I ever believed possible at spinning a tale of complete, total, fiction.

It is time just to strip all of this aside and just strip the budget and all the other questions aside and ask ourselves in the sober light of day, as Americans—not as Democrats or Republicans, but as Americans—what works in this country and what does not work.

What should we save and what should we get rid of? What should we fight for and what should we decide to scrap? If we do that, we will all conclude, it seems to me, not that we will try to follow the string of some constituency out there, but that we will aggressively put our nose to the grindstone here and work to reduce the Federal budget deficit.

We will aggressively decide to ask the American people, yes, to pay the current taxes in order to reduce the Federal budget deficit. Pay the taxes that now exist in the current tax law, and we will aggressively will protect those things that make this country a

better country, and make life in this country better for all Americans, especially those Americans who have gone before us in the work force, who have built this country, who survived the Depression, who fought the wars, who beat back the oppression of Hitler's nazism.

To those folks in this country who helped build and make this a great country, we are now saying to them, well, we are sorry, you will have to pay a little more for your health care. We will threaten Medicare because we want to give wealthy people a tax break. There is nothing wrong with being wealthy, but I am saying those priorities are out of whack.

I finish with one more point. I think the opportunity to do well, be successful, and make money is a terrific thing in this country. I wish everybody could achieve those things. But in my hometown, one person decides that he will commit his life to making as much money as he can and does so and is enormously successful as a business person. And there is another couple living on the other end of the street. He decides he will be a minister in a small rural church. Of course he does not get paid very much. So his wife teaches piano lessons to make ends meet, and they reach age 65 or 70. They have worked very hard their entire lives, but they do not have anything. No assets, no pension, no retirement system, no income.

I just ask the question, did they contribute less to their community? Did they contribute less, ministering in a rural church, giving piano lessons, helping children? Did they contribute less than the people who decided to, in every way every day, make as much money as they could?

No, both contributed to this country. That is why the things that make life better to people who contribute in that way, such as the Medicare Program, are important.

That is why we fight for them and why I am proud to say it is my party that created this program. I think it will be our party, by reaching out and joining hands with others, who will make sure this program is around for the long-term in this country's future. I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Would the Chair inform the Senator when he has 3 minutes remaining.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAIG). The Senator will be notified.

VIOLENCE AGAINST GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Guy Pence is a Federal employee and a public servant in the true sense of the word. He is a forest ranger.

Mr. President, I became acquainted with Guy Pence about 3 or 4 years ago at this same time of the year when he took me on a pack trip into a place in Nevada called Table Mountain. It is a Forest Service wilderness area. There