

I do not believe any of us really think that this set of priorities makes sense for this country's future—B-2 bombers, star wars, blimps, ships, submarines, and airplanes that nobody ordered, nobody asked for, and nobody wanted; \$7 billion more pumped into the Defense appropriations bill that nobody asked for. And then we say we are sorry, Timmy, or Tommy or Ruth or Mary; you are 4 years old and poor and want a head start, you want an opportunity. We are sorry; America cannot afford you.

I wish to make one final point, and then I wish to yield to my friend from New Mexico. I was at an airport on Saturday, and a woman asked if she could visit with me as I walked through the airport. I said sure. She was a woman in her late seventies, and she began very quietly because she did not want anybody to hear. And as she began to speak, her chin began to quiver and she, I could tell, was going to have trouble holding back tears. And tears filled her eyes, and here is what she said to me. She said: My husband's in a nursing home, been there 3 years. We have a very small farm. I have now sold most of it to pay for his nursing home care. She said the problem is, I do not have any more money except we have got the home place, the house, and I wish to stay in my house. I do not want to have to sell my house. Her eyes were filled with tears. She says: I am not asking for favors. We have never asked anybody for anything. We have never been on the end of a hand-out. We have always made our own way. But this woman, in her late seventies, with tears in her eyes and her chin quivering, says: All I wish to do is be able to live in my house.

The fact is all of these people are victims of policies that say we ought to buy B-2 bombers and star wars instead of helping a 78-year-old woman stay in her home, instead of deciding we should not drive that woman into the poorhouse so that her husband can stay in a nursing home. All of these people, that woman, a young 4-year old kid, all of them have names. Senior citizens, Head Start kids, family farmers who are going to lose the farm, all of them have names. Those are the victims of bad choices in budget priorities. It is why, as we debate this, we have to think through what is good for our country, what advances America's economic interests. Is it just making sure those who have a lot get more? Or is it deciding, yes, the investors are important; yes, people who have done well and are successful are important to this country.

There is nothing wrong with that, no dispute about that. But there are others with needs in America that are important as well. Addressing those needs sometimes represents an enormous investment. It breeds enormous returns for our future. That is what this debate is about. And the outcome of this debate will determine what life is going to be like for that older woman, who

cries because she wants to keep her home, or for some young child who deserves a start in the Head Start Program.

Mr. President, I yield 8 minutes to the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. BINGAMAN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FAIRCLOTH). The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Mexico.

MEDICARE AND MEDICAID

Mr. BINGAMAN. I thank the Chair. I appreciate that time to speak about some of what is going on in Congress. There is a lot going on, but I wish to speak particularly about the Medicare and Medicaid proposals that we are going to have to vote on in the near future.

Mr. President, 30 years ago, when President Johnson signed into law the Medicare legislation, which really did establish a contract with the people of this country, New Mexico was very proud at that time because one of our great statesmen, Senator Clinton Anderson, was standing with President Johnson there in Missouri at the time that legislation was signed.

As many who have studied American history may recall, the legislation that enacted Medicare was called the King-Anderson bill, and Anderson, of course, was the Senate sponsor of that legislation, and very proudly so.

Since that historic day in the summer of 1965, the Medicare Program has made health care a reality for thousands of people throughout this country and, of course, thousands in New Mexico. It has been the lifeblood of many of my State's rural hospitals and rural health care providers. Today, the program is at a serious risk, and I am not at all confident that the contract that President Johnson and Senator Anderson then had worked out and fought for will survive in the same form that they enacted it.

The Republican majority here in Congress is proposing to reduce Federal resources for health care in this year's budget by \$450 billion from Medicare and Medicaid. That will occur, of course, over the next 7 years. In New Mexico, the result clearly will be less health care for poor children and a greater financial burden on seniors and families who attempt to care for seniors.

Today, there are some 300,000 New Mexicans who depend upon Medicaid for health care, and 60 percent of those 300,000—180,000, roughly—are poor children. I think that is a fact on which many have not focused in this debate, particularly on Medicaid. A significant majority of the people who are beneficiaries of Medicaid are poor children. That is certainly true in my State.

Under legislation that has been proposed by the Republican majority in the House and the Senate, many of these children are bound to go with less health care available to them. Both the House and Senate bills call

for major reductions in Medicaid funds to my State, New Mexico. In the House bill, the reductions in funding for New Mexico will exceed \$900 million over the next 7 years, almost \$1 billion. In the Senate bill, the reductions will exceed \$600 million. The Federal Department of Health and Human Services predicts that the loss in funding will cause our State, New Mexico, to reduce the number of people being served by Medicaid by 19 percent.

Now, if 19 percent of the 180,000 children presently served are dropped from the program, then more than 34,000 poor New Mexico children who today are covered by Medicaid will not be covered by Medicaid in the future.

Some may argue that this will never happen; that the State will make up the difference; that any shortfall in funds will be made up by our State legislature and/or Governor. If that is true, I guess my question is, why is my State joining with 23 other States in sending a letter protesting the overly prescriptive and onerous provisions that are contained in the Senate bill, specifically the requirements that States provide health care for below-poverty-line pregnant women and children up to age 12.

Mr. President, under the current Medicaid Program, our State is required to provide service to these vulnerable individuals, and my question is, why do we not just continue with that requirement? According to the Governors' letter, which I referred to earlier, continuing with that requirement could potentially lead to a huge cost shift to the States and the States want the flexibility to avoid that cost shift and thereby reduce the benefits to that vulnerable group.

In New Mexico, more than 212,000 seniors and children and adults with disabilities currently depend upon Medicare in addition to those who depend upon Medicaid, and by the year 2002 more than 257,000 New Mexicans are anticipated to be eligible for the program. More than 210,000 of those will be seniors.

What do these program cuts that are contained in the legislation we are going to vote on this next week mean to seniors? According to the American Association of Retired Persons study of this issue, the average Medicare beneficiary in my State will pay a minimum of \$2,000 more in higher deductibles, higher copays, and there are many services that will not be covered. It also means a raising of the eligibility age from 65 to 67 beginning in the year 2003.

Mr. President, a cost shift of this type and this size is especially tough on New Mexico seniors and their families because so many of those in my State who are seniors live at or near poverty. One in every five New Mexicans, including about 26,000 seniors, lives in poverty in my State. Many of the State's seniors are barely making ends meet today.

The question is, how can poor, elderly New Mexicans possibly come up with the additional resources, this additional \$2,000 that it is anticipated they will have to come up with? Medicaid currently pays for \$188 million of nursing home care in New Mexico annually. I heard the Senator from North Dakota speak about the woman who had a husband in a nursing home.

We have many people in nursing homes in my State, and they benefit substantially from the payments that Medicaid makes. Through the Medicaid Program the State typically picks up the extra cost where Medicaid falls off. But to do so, under the cuts that are proposed, the State must raise additional revenue. And it would be substantial additional revenue, this \$188 million that I referred to earlier. That would be in addition to the \$600 to \$900 million shortfall which also would have to be made up if services were to continue as they presently are.

If New Mexico will not or cannot raise the revenue needed to keep the safety net in place without Federal assistance for these 300,000 current beneficiaries, the results are very clear, Mr. President. Thousands of seniors and children in my State will be denied adequate health care in the future.

The arguments for these cuts are well known by all of us. Proponents say the cuts are necessary to get us to a balanced budget. But if a balanced budget is the goal, then my question is, why here today at this very moment do we have a committee marking up a bill to cut taxes in this country by \$245 billion over this same period? If a balanced budget is the goal, and poor children and seniors have to do without health care in order to meet that goal, then why cannot the Congress also limit spending for the Pentagon to the amount that the Pentagon requested?

All of New Mexico's shortfall, every single dollar of New Mexico's shortfall in Federal funds for health care could be offset by foregoing one of the additional B-2 bombers that the Republican Congress insists on ordering.

So this debate, in my view, is not about whether we should reduce expenditures on health care. Clearly, we need to make some reductions. And we will do that. The debate is how deep those cuts will be, where the greatest burden of this deficit reduction will fall, what the priorities of this Nation are. These priorities should include maintaining decent health care for the most vulnerable in our society. The proposal that is being presented to us this next week does not provide for that.

Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to speak. And I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. DORGAN. I yield 7 minutes to the Senator from West Virginia.

OBJECTION TO FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. I thank the distinguished presiding officer and the distinguished Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. President, crowds are gathering to watch a train wreck. It is going to be a budget wreck. And it is going to be a horrible, horrible pileup. Maybe that ghoulis fascination about what is ahead is, in fact, distracting us, diverting us from the daily bashing that vulnerable Americans are taking every single day in the actions of this Congress.

But today, weeks before that big crash, I have seen enough. Speaking for this Senator, the junior Senator from West Virginia, I have seen enough. I have been fighting, offering amendments, voting no, but today I object. I object to all of it, to taking one more step, to letting the latest injury go unanswered.

I have put in an objection to the Senate Finance Committee's meeting. And as a result of my objection, they cannot meet after the hour of 2. And I will do that every day, and I will do that all the way through the reconciliation process until a particular part involving old coal miners is removed from the bill the Senate Finance Committee is now working on.

This new Republican leadership will go to any length to seize the crown jewel of their contract. And that is to ring out \$245 billion in new tax breaks for a privileged few. But at what cost? At whose expense? Every day their answer becomes more savage. Pilfering school lunch moneys, turning 4-year-olds away from Head Start classes, eliminating standards for screening and testing for childhood diseases.

Where does it end? Not there. Brick by brick, they are tearing down the Medicare Program, the efficient, effective, popular insurance program that protects senior citizens from poverty, which they once knew, and pain, turning their backs on the elderly and in nursing homes, allowing again, as we cut out almost 10 years ago, patients in nursing homes who were considered to be disruptive to be tethered down, tied down, or drugged into passivity. That will now be legal. And it will be done. Doubling the cost of health insurance for the most fragile amongst us. Had enough?

Sticking students with higher loan fees, squeezing out job training opportunities, cutting the number of college loans, opening a loophole to drop the disabled from health coverage. Senator CHAFEE and I did that. It passed the Senate Finance Committee 17 to 3. Pregnant women, children 12 years and younger, and the disabled. And unilaterally it was dropped. And then at the last moment, because some of us came to the floor of the U.S. Senate to expose that ruse, it was put back in, sort of, by saying, "Let the States set the standards."

Charging families more to care for their mentally ill or retarded children. Closing the doors on more than half of our special ed classrooms. How much more could they want? Mugging the working poor with a \$43 billion tax hike.

What do I mean by that? The earned-income tax credit being cut by \$43 billion. Those are people who are living out America's dream, working without health insurance, all of them virtually, but working, refusing to go on welfare, many of them making less money than if they were on welfare, and their kids not getting Medicaid, health care coverage to boot. But they are doing it because they want to work.

So we talk about honoring work in America. And then we turn around and cut those who are at the very bottom edge of the working poor, a \$43 billion tax increase for them, money which they earned which they will now not get to keep because we are changing the rules on them.

We are turning off the heat, Mr. President. We are turning off the heat, quite literally, taking away money from remedial reading and writing for poor children. Are they done yet? No. Not quite.

Today a new provision to unravel the health benefits for retired coal miners and their widows has been added to this long list of atrocities. It is a small group, Mr. President, only 92,000 individuals in all 50 States. A small group, I admit that; the average age, 76 years old. Most worked in the mines for decades back in the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's.

They had to work in 3-foot crawl spaces in ice water. They did the hard work, pick and shovel. And now we want to take away their health insurance. It is being done in the Senate Finance Committee. These were the people that fueled the economic growth and the prosperity of our country. These days I meet these miners that I am talking about in their homes in West Virginia. Many struggle to walk.

Mr. President, if I could only describe to you what it is for an older miner, attached to oxygen, with black lung, with all kinds of problems of breathing, taking a fistful of pills a day. Just a simple act, to watch that miner try to get up out of his chair and then to walk very, very slowly across the room to the television set to change the channel or to turn the set on or off, and then very slowly come back, fall back into that chair—almost a day's journey is the physical impact of that.

These are the people we are talking about. Old people, ravaged by the only work that they possibly could have done, because of where they grew up and what work was available. Pills for blood pressure, for constant joint pain. They do not have much. They never earned a lot. There are no big pensions.

But these miners, Mr. President, traded wages every year. They traded wages that they got for digging coal to get health insurance security, because