

twist the information so that it casts us in a light of being people that sneak around in the night—can you imagine that, saying we did this in the “dark of the night,” that we were sneaky, when we have had so many days of hearings, so many public statements on the floor, so many votes both here and in the House?

I think there is just no question that a Cabinet officer who does that should be called to attention, and we should ask: Is this the conduct that this administration believes should be the conduct of a Cabinet officer? When he raised his hand and said he would support the Constitution, as you and I did, Mr. President, does that not mean we will be truthful in the conduct of our business, the public business?

We do it out in front of everybody, right here on the floor. We did our action of putting this amendment in the bill, by a vote of the committee. We have had three votes on the floor this year. We have been here for 15 years now trying to get this Congress to proceed as was contemplated in 1980. I do not think it is proper to call us “sneaky,” or to say we are doing it in the dark of the night.

I hope more and more people in America understand that those who make allegations like that have something to hide themselves. I am going to find some way to bring to the American public the truth in these statements that are being made by the Cabinet members of this administration.

Mr. LAUTENBERG addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ASHCROFT). The Senator from New Jersey is recognized.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I want to talk just a few minutes now. I understand that the unanimous-consent agreement that has been propounded and accepted limits Senators to 5 minutes. I ask unanimous consent to extend that to 10 minutes.

Mr. STEVENS. I would have to object, Mr. President. We, of course, have no objection if the Senator wishes to be recognized for the second time. But in the interest of fairness, we have set 5 minutes per Senator. If there is another Senator to speak at the end of that 5 minutes, he should be recognized.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. That is not an unfair response. Perhaps at the end of that time, I will call on using leader time, which I understand has been made available to me.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey is recognized for 5 minutes.

THE BUDGET

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, as the Democrat and Republican negotiators sit down and try to work out a final budget, I want to urge the negotiators to begin their discussions by agreeing on a fundamental principle. The principle is critical to Democrats like me and to the overwhelming majority of Americans. The principle is

this: Congress should not cut Medicare to pay for tax breaks for the wealthy.

Mr. President, the current Republican budget, which has yet to be sent to President Clinton, violates this basic principle because the heart of the Republican plan cuts Medicare by \$270 billion, and it is going to be used to pay for \$245 billion in tax breaks. The President has made it quite clear that these Medicare cuts for tax breaks are a quid pro quo and totally unacceptable. It is a basic matter of principle.

I also want to remind my colleagues about some of the other objectionable provisions in the Republican reconciliation bill. The budget proposed by the Republicans also cuts Medicaid by \$163 billion. This will mean huge cuts in nursing home care for seniors and care for the disabled.

The bill includes a \$23 billion cut in the earned income tax credit, and this means that 17 million working families, who make less than \$30,000 a year, will have to pay more in taxes. They will get a tax increase because the earned income tax credit, which helped them sustain themselves, will no longer be available. At the same time, the top 1 percent, who make over \$350,000 a year, will get an \$8,400 tax break. It is unnecessary and, frankly, it is unconscionable.

The bill also tears apart the safety net for poor children. Under the Republican so-called welfare reform provisions, between 1.2 and 2.1 million children will be thrust into poverty, potentially going hungry.

Mr. President, the basic thrust of this legislation is to balance the budget on the backs of working families and senior citizens, while handing out billions in tax breaks for the rich and powerful. It is an extreme approach. I know that Speaker GINGRICH and his followers believe in it strongly, but, in my view, it is fundamentally wrong.

Mr. President, when you get right down to it, the Republican budget forces all of us to answer a simple question, one that I have discussed many times here. It is very directly saying: “Whose side are you on?” That is the question being asked. Are you on the side of the rich and the powerful and the special interests? Or are you on the side of those who go to work every day worrying about how they will pay their bills, get their kids to college, sustain a lifestyle they have worked so hard to get, and worry about what happens in their later years? Or are you on the side of those who do not need help, but who have influence down here, who get to talk to a lot of people in Government, those who make the decisions?

That is the fundamental question that we are discussing as we consider the budget. The Republican reconciliation bill is pay dirt for the rich and the special interests, while senior citizens and working class families get stuck footing higher bills. This is an outrage.

We Democrats are going to continue to resist it as a basic matter of principle. We saw what happened with the

continuing resolution when the public caught on to this scheme.

Under the spotlight, our friends on the Republican side blinked. They retreated. They ran away. They wanted to escape the public wrath and quickly abandoned their deep principles for political cover. They quickly backed off their large increases in Medicare part B premiums.

Mr. President, the Republican budget makes the biggest cuts in the history of Medicare. I have heard the case made, “No, we are not making cuts. What we are doing is increasing the pot.” Yes, but there are a lot more people who are aging and who will be part of the Medicare population, and on a per capita basis they get hit very, very hard.

Republicans build their case around a false premise. They argue that in order to save Medicare they want to destroy its fundamental mission. That is not true. They ought to be frank with the American people about two major Republican misstatements.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator from New Jersey wish to request additional time?

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for an additional 5 minutes.

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

Mr. LAUTENBERG. The first misstatement that our Republican friends make is we need \$270 billion to save Medicare. That is simply untrue.

The Republicans are using this \$270 billion, as I said before, to finance their \$245 billion in tax breaks for the rich folk. It is no coincidence that Medicare cuts are \$270 billion and the tax breaks for the wealthy total \$245 billion.

These figures are remarkably similar because one is being used to finance the other. They are taking from our senior citizens who paid the bills, signed the contract, worked hard and weathered the storm, and they are giving it back to the wealthy and the special interests.

The second Republican falsehood is that we need to cut \$270 billion to make Medicare solvent. Not true. The chief Health and Human Services Medicare actuary has said that we only need \$89 billion in savings to make Medicare solvent until the end of the year 2006.

Let me give some examples of what kind of tax breaks these Medicare cuts are paying for: Under this bill, approximately 2,000 large corporations will get a tax break of \$2 million apiece because of changes in the alternative minimum tax calculations; the bill also gives an \$800,000 tax break to people with estates over \$2.5 million to be able to pass on to their heirs an additional \$800,000 tax break. It is not fair. It is not right.

Additionally, this bill contains hundreds of millions of dollars in giveaways to the oil companies.

Finally, the capital gains tax cut included in this bill is a tax break for the superrich. Anyone can claim this tax break. We saw that in a vote here. Even those who make more than \$1 million a year can get this tax break.

Mr. President, I tried to draw a line in the tax sand, to use the expression, and put the money back into Medicare and Medicaid. I offered an amendment when we discussed our reconciliation bill that would have precluded the tax breaks from going to those who make over \$1 million in a single year. That is one-tenth of 1 percent of all our taxpayers. This small group, I felt, did not need a tax break—making \$1 million a year, that is a lot of money.

I thought this amendment could pass substantially. Maybe even unanimously. I thought that people here would finally say, "No, we think that is fair, that people who make over \$1 million a year ought not to get an additional tax break." I thought we could all agree that millionaires, billionaires, do not need a break when we are cutting Medicare, especially when 75 percent of all the Medicare recipients earn under \$25,000 each year.

However, 52 of 53 of the Republican Senators voted against my amendment. In essence, they said their preference is cut Medicare, cut Medicaid, and we will keep on giving tax breaks to those millionaires and the billionaires—show them what good guys we are.

Mr. President, Medicare is not just a health insurance program. Medicare is a contract. It is a commitment we made to our citizens. It is a promise for those who worked hard for their entire lives that your health care needs will be taken care of when you retire. They paid for it.

This Republican budget uses the Medicare Program as a slush fund for the tax breaks for the wealthy.

Mr. President, I hope that the Republican leadership will give up their plan to cut Medicare to pay for tax breaks for the rich, give up deep cuts in Medicaid, give up tax increases on working families, give up the destruction of the safety net that will put millions of children into poverty, give up the huge cuts in education and the environment. It is time to start over.

If the Republicans are serious about moving towards the balanced budget, they will give up on these draconian cuts, those cuts that hurt so much. They will honor a basic principle that declares whose side Government is on, that no Medicare cuts will be used to pay for tax breaks for the rich, that they will confirm that the Government is here to help give assistance to those who need help the most. Those who are wealthy do not need special assistance from the Government.

It is time to start over, Mr. President, and put together a budget that protects Medicare and Medicaid and working families, poor children, provide education to help get the population to lead our country into the

next century, to provide the kind of leadership that can make us more competitive, to continue the kind of position that the United States of America has had for so many years, and to provide our future generations with a decent and clean environment.

I hope that will get consideration, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

SAFE DRINKING WATER ACT

Mr. KERREY. Mr. President, yesterday the Senate passed S. 1316, the Safe Drinking Water Act. I did not have the opportunity to speak on it while it was under consideration and I want to point out some things in that bill that I believe are very constructive.

I will call to the attention of my colleagues that I think we passed a piece of legislation that will enhance voters' confidence, citizens' confidence, that we can, in fact, take a law that has accomplished a great deal.

The Safe Drinking Water Act has improved the quality of life in America considerably, and has been a great success story, but it needed to be changed. There was an urgent need to change the legislation. We passed it last year in this body. The House was unable to pass a piece of legislation, and as a consequence it died.

I want to thank Chairman JOHN CHAFEE. He was very instrumental. Without his leadership this bill would not have passed. Chairman KEMPTHORNE, as well, was very diligent and determined to pass the legislation. Senator BAUCUS, Senator REID, both from rural States, understand the importance of changing this legislation. They, like me, have heard from local communities talking about if we are going to maintain the consent to regulate safe drinking water that we have to change the current law.

I will talk about a few issues, Mr. President. I will go through them real quickly. First is the issue of radon in the drinking water. Under the current law, the EPA was required to promulgate a standard for radon by a court-ordered deadline.

Unfortunately, that standard was a much higher standard than any scientist said was necessary to protect the people. There is no dispute here. This is not a situation where we have anybody coming forward and saying that the standard that was required under this rule was too low.

This standard was set so high that it was going to cost rural communities, in some cases, \$5,000 per user to implement. We had withheld the appropriations for several years to promulgate this rule, and this piece of legislation now will take the appropriators off the hook. It changes the law. It gives EPA the authority to promulgate a rule of 3,000 picocuries per liter, which is what all science is saying is needed. It will save rural providers of water in Nebraska nearly \$1 billion over a 7- to 10-year period. It is a substantial amount of money that is at stake.

The second issue is the current law, that is the issue of sound science and using sound science in evaluating both the risk and what we do. In the 1986 amendments, we decided we were going to regulate 25 contaminants every 3 years whether those contaminants needed to be regulated or not. This strict method of establishing standards caused some contaminants to be regulated without a sound scientific basis. It is an issue that is very irritating when you are, again, at a local level and are required to spend money looking for a contaminant that has never been there. It has never been in the water. Nobody expects it to be in the water. Nobody has any reasonable basis to believe it is going to be in the water. But because of this strict standard, we were required to regulate it anyway.

The new law authorizes EPA to use \$10 million from the State revolving fund on health effects research. EPA is to establish a priority risk of unregulated contaminants and gather health effects and occurrence information on the listed contaminants. The Administrator of EPA must consult with the Centers for Disease Control as it does this analysis. In other words, it cannot just come to a regulatory conclusion without some reference to what our scientists, particularly our health scientists, are telling us about what is going on with drinking water. The States are to monitor for up to 20 unregulated contaminants to collect information for future standards.

The next issue is the standard setting itself. Under current law, EPA has established standards for more than 80 drinking water contaminants. The 1986 amendments required EPA to promulgate 25 new standards every 3 years. The cost to small communities, again, are not considered at all when these standards are set. This legislation, this change in the law, repeals the "25 every 3 years" rule and establishes a new mechanism to identify contaminants for future regulation by consulting with the Centers for Disease Control.

Again, if we are trying to have safe drinking water, it seems to be reasonable to reference those individuals who have the responsibility for telling us what is causing Americans to get sick from drinking our water. EPA is to conduct a benefit-cost analysis for each new standard before it is promulgated, and if EPA determines the benefits of a standard issued under current law would not justify the cost of the systems that must comply with the standard, EPA must issue a less stringent standard that maximizes health risk reduction at a cost that is justified.

I have heard people come and say we are weakening standards. We unquestionably are not. This is a change that will allow us, again with reference to what is causing Americans to get sick, if there is a health problem that the Centers for Disease Control—Mr. President, is there a limitation on time?