

country we would believe that he is innocent at this point—then his arrest is an example of a system that is on the verge of going out of control.

I want to make it clear here that we will be following Mr. Cordero's arrest closely. How his case and his personal safety are handled will be the subject of considerable attention. I know that bureaucracies hate whistle-blowers, here or, I am for sure, they hate them in Mexico as well. The integrity of public institutions, however, can only be maintained if people in those institutions, with regard for documentation, are able to tell their stories without retaliation.

Mr. Cordero's case is very disturbing. And if it should prove to be a case of retaliation, it does not speak well of Mexico's ability to deal seriously with the problems of corruption.

I call on the Mexican Government to resolve this case quickly, and, of course, fairly. I ask our own U.S. administration, even those of us here in the Congress, to monitor this case very closely. And in the case of the administration, please keep Congress informed. I expect Mr. Cordero's rights—most importantly, his personal safety—will receive particular attention. Thank you.

Mrs. BOXER addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Thank you very much.

Before the Senator from Iowa leaves the floor, I want to thank him for bringing this issue before the Senate.

Mexico is continually asking for cooperation with this country in the areas of trade. I say to my friend, I am in a little bit of a battle right now over the dolphin-safe fishing of tuna where the Mexicans are really fighting very hard to have us change the rules of the game so they can go out and purse seine on dolphin and sell their tuna here in competition with our dolphin-safe American tuna people.

They want our cooperation, and yet we know the drugs are coming from Mexico, yet we know they are doing, I would say, virtually nothing to stop illegal immigration. I believe it is important to have a warm and good relationship with our neighbor, Mexico. But I think the Senator has raised an issue that really requires the attention of the U.S. Senate. And I will work with him, and I know Senator FEINSTEIN, the senior Senator from California, will as well. Again, I want to thank him for raising this issue.

LEGISLATION PASSED BY CONGRESS

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I came to the floor because I have been watching a series of dueling press conferences, one held by the Republicans this morning, the Republican leadership, one held by the Democratic leadership, to discuss who deserves credit for the flurry of legislation that has finally passed this Congress, after a do-nothing Congress.

Of course, the American people are going to make the decision about who deserves the credit or the blame, depending on how they view the legislation. The issues are welfare, health care, and minimum wage. We remember back to President Clinton talking about how it was important to reform welfare as we know it, the fact that he granted many waivers to the States to reform welfare, the fact that he presented some excellent welfare reform bills which I consider to be real reform.

I think what the Republican Congress put out is very hurtful to my home State. It is a huge, unfunded mandate, and it also hurts children. As I said yesterday, it amazed me that Senators who earn large paychecks in relation to most of the people in this country did not have the heart to mandate that the little kids who are helpless and hopeless, whose parents cannot find a job, that they are not assured diapers, school supplies, emergency food and other things. So people will decide on that one.

On health care, we know Senator KENNEDY, for years, has worked on that. Senator KASSEBAUM and he got together and passed two provisions of the Clinton health care reform bill, very important provisions. I am very hopeful we will see portability of health insurance, so that when Americans lose their jobs, they can take their health care with them and they will not be punished if they have a pre-existing condition.

Who deserves credit for that? The Republicans say they do; I say look at the record. It was Senator Dole who blocked Senator KASSEBAUM from bringing up the bill time and time again. It is in the RECORD. Finally she said, "I will offer it every day." We finally have a bill.

Minimum wage. I do not have to tell you that DICK ARMEY, the majority leader of the Republicans, said, "I will fight a minimum wage increase with every fiber in my body." Well, it was not good enough, Mr. ARMEY, because the army of people in this country did not agree with you. Now you want to take credit over there for it. The most important thing to this Senator is that people will get a minimum wage increase—I am happy about that—millions of hard-working Americans who do not want a handout, they want to work for a decent wage. Most of them, by the way, are adults, and most of them are women.

So we have an argument going on. As I watched the Republican press conference, it brought to mind a little fable. I want to tell you the little fable. Once upon a time, in 1994, the real Republicans took over the U.S. Congress. They came in like the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood, and this is what they did, on the record: They tried to roll back environmental laws that protect our children. I know, I am on the Environment Committee. I saw it. They tried to sell off our parks. As a matter of fact, Chairman HANSEN said publicly

it was not a question that they would close down the parks, it is just how they would do it.

They tried to give huge tax breaks to millionaires, paid for by the middle class. They put through the largest cuts ever in education in the history of our country. They denied many American women the right to choose. That is on the record. They even shut down the Government because Democrats would not let them destroy Medicare.

That is only part of it. Then the real Republicans read the polls and realized they were about to lose the elections. So before your eyes, the wolf has put on a grandma's disguise just like the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood, a grandma's smile, a grandma's voice, sweet, and it is telling the American people, "Look at the goodies we have done for you."

There are different versions for the end of Little Red Riding Hood. In one she gets eaten alive because she trusts the wolf. In the other she found out that Grandma is really a wolf in disguise, and she is saved.

We say, today we do not think the American people will be fooled by this costume because the real Republicans are on the record. I love the new ones. I have never enjoyed it more than the last few days of being able to get some work done around here, that will make life better for the people.

But I have to say in closing, do not take my word for it. Listen to what House Republican whip DENNIS HASTERT has said, on the record, quoted in the St. Louis Dispatch, June 9, 1996: "After November, it will be a different story."

So, for now, we see different Republicans. I am going to reach out to those different Republicans. Let's do something about pensions. Let's do something about paycheck security. Let's put more police on the beat. Let's do something about terrorism. Let's not back off of this taggant issue. Tag those explosives used in bombs. Let's work together on these issues. Let's go with President Clinton's idea to give our middle-class families a tax break for education. Let's put more investment into research for diseases like Alzheimer's and cancer and AIDS, and wipe these scourges off the face of the Earth.

We can do it. We can do it, I say to my friends in your new outlook, in your new desire to work. But I say to the American people, look out. Watch out for the disguise.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

A REPORT CARD ON SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, I rise today to communicate some very good news to my colleagues in the Senate. The good news is about an issue that I have previously talked about on two or three occasions on the Senate floor, the issue of schoolbus safety.

Over the last year and a half, I have been working on an important problem affecting the safety of America's schoolchildren. Mr. President, tragically, since 1991, at least six children have died in accidents involving defective handrails on schoolbuses. Other children have been injured.

My interest in this issue, Mr. President, came about because of a horrible tragedy in my home county in Greene County, OH. A little girl by the name of Brandie Browder was killed. She was killed because of one of these defective handrails and because the drawstring from her clothing was caught on that handrail as she was trying to get off the bus. She was stuck there, and unfortunately the bus ultimately ran over her.

We have been working for the last year and a half on this particular problem. As I indicated, we have made some, I think, very, very important progress.

Mr. President, ever since I learned about these accidents, we have been trying to warn communities, schools, and parents in Ohio and across the country about this danger. We have publicized some methods for reducing the risk to children, such as a test we use in Ohio to determine whether a handrail is safe.

Mr. President, I have also chaired two Senate hearings—two Senate hearings—to investigate this problem. At the most recent of these hearings, this past April, we displayed this chart. I might say, Mr. President, to explain this for a moment, the question, does your State remove schoolbuses with dangerous handrails? This was the status as of April, the red being “no,” the States that did not deal with this problem; the yellow being states that were dealing with this problem. This was an interim report. If we would have gone back a year before that, we probably would have seen virtually every State in the Union in the red with a “no.” So this was the progress as of April. You can see, Mr. President and Members of the Senate, at that time there were still at least 15 States that had these dangerous buses on the road.

Since that time I have been working with both my colleagues in the Senate and directly with officials in these States to see what we can do to fix this problem. We have come a long way. I am glad to announce today, that as of today, as you can see in this new chart, all States except one—all States except one—are taking active measures to get schoolbuses with defective handrails off the road.

Mr. President, as we approach a new school year, it is my hope that the last remaining State, the State of Georgia, will follow suit and will do this by the beginning of the school year. I have been working with Senator COVERDELL to bring this issue to the attention of the relevant officials in Georgia. We certainly hope that Georgia will take action soon.

Mr. President, we are close to a solution on the issue of defective handrails.

I am encouraged by the cooperation I have received from my colleagues in this Chamber, and I want to help them for all the help they have given my office over the last year and a half. Let me stress that schoolbuses are already the very safest mode of transportation. They should be, because they carry the most precious asset that any of us have, and that is our children.

Mr. President, we do have to do everything we can to make them even safer. That is why I will continue to work on other areas of the schoolbus safety issue. But on this issue, Mr. President, we are very, very close to solving the problem. If we can continue working together in this effective, bipartisan manner, I expect to make a great deal more progress on school bus safety in the months ahead.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

Mr. THURMOND addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. THURMOND. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. THURMOND pertaining to the introduction of S. 2022 are located in today's RECORD under “Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.”)

CONFERENCE REPORT TO ACCOMPANY H.R. 3230, THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1997

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I want to urge the Senate to consider the conference report on the national defense authorization bill for fiscal year 1997 before we adjourn for the August Recess.

I need not remind my colleagues that the Constitution vests the power to raise and support armies, provide and maintain a navy and to make rules for the Government and regulation of land and naval forces in the Congress. We execute that power through the Defense authorization bill which is currently awaiting consideration by the Senate. The 1997 national defense authorization bill provides the funds and authorities for the Department of Defense to carry out its functions for the coming fiscal year. It is a good bill that provides critical funding for our forces deployed around the globe in support of our national security. It would be a travesty if the security and welfare of our forces is put at risk because of political squabbling in the Senate.

Throughout my 40 years on the Senate Armed Services Committee, it has been my philosophy that national defense is a bipartisan effort. The conference report that is pending before the Senate is a bipartisan effort. It passed the House last night by an overwhelming vote. It will pass the Senate in the same bipartisan vote if given a chance.

Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to work with the leadership to resolve the deadlock that is holding up consideration of the Defense authorization

bill by the Senate. We owe it to the Nation, but more importantly we owe it to the men and women in uniform who are deployed to the trouble spots throughout the world.

Mr. President, I would also like to request that before the Senate recesses, it approve the military nominations that are pending. The nominations are not political and we must not allow these nominations, some of which are for critical positions, to be delayed any longer.

Thank you Mr. President. I yield the floor.

Mr. HEFLIN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

THE HEALTH INSURANCE REFORM ACT CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. HEFLIN. Mr. President, I am pleased to rise in support of the conference report to S. 1028, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. The road leading to this compromise has been long and tortuous, but I'm happy that the leaders in this effort have finally come to an agreement.

Over the past 5 years, the issue of health care reform has been at the top of our national agenda. The need for an overhaul in our health care delivery system was a centerpiece of the last Presidential campaign, and our inability to enact comprehensive reform legislation 2 years ago was a profound disappointment. At the same time, there remains a firm national consensus that something must be done to reform the health care system.

The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that between 32 and 37 million Americans have no health insurance, and an additional 50 to 60 million are underinsured. As stated by the Office of Management and Budget, a total of 13 percent of all Americans are completely uninsured, with as many as 28 percent without insurance for 1 month or more. The Labor Department reports that each year, 1 million people lose their health insurance.

As currently structured, the private health insurance market provides an insufficient level of coverage for individuals and families with major health problems and makes it difficult for employers to obtain adequate coverage for their employees. This is especially true of small businesses.

The Health Insurance Reform Act will reduce many of the existing barriers to obtaining insurance coverage by making it easier for people who change jobs or lose their jobs to maintain adequate coverage. As many as 25 million Americans will be helped by this legislation, since it protects portability and against losing insurance due to preexisting medical conditions.

This measure builds upon innovative and successful state reforms and enhances the private market by requiring health plans to compete based on quality, price, and service instead of refusing to offer coverage to those who are