

part of a reconciliation bill that is designed to cut spending for the purpose of accommodating additional tax cuts.

One of the reasons that Medicare has such widespread support is because it provides health insurance coverage for virtually all older Americans. If through means testing we create an incentive for wealthier, healthier people to drop out of the program because they can get a better deal outside of Medicare, then we ought to at least understand and consider the ramifications of that.

There are other things about the Senate bill that create substantial new burdens on low- and moderate-income older Americans. Under this bill, seniors will be asked to pay significant new out-of-pocket costs. In North Dakota, 70 percent of our senior citizens have incomes under \$15,000, and on average, they spend \$2,500 for prescription drugs and other health care expenses not covered by Medicare or supplemental insurance. Many of these folks simply cannot afford to pay much more.

I am concerned about the new \$5 co-payment for home health visits. I voted to eliminate this new cost from the Senate bill. While \$5 may not seem like a lot of money to many of us, a lot of the seniors who rely on home health care cannot afford this extra expense and might be forced to enter a hospital or nursing home at significantly greater cost to the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

This bill also erodes the protections that currently exist in Medicare which limit the amount doctors can charge Medicare beneficiaries above and beyond the Medicare-approved amount. This bill results in millions of dollars in new out-of-pocket costs.

The conferees on this bill have an opportunity to address these concerns and to drop troubling provisions from the bill, such as the means testing of the Medicare premium, the increase in the Medicare eligibility age, and the new home health care co-payment. Eliminating these provisions from the final bill would still lengthen the solvency of the Medicare program for 10 more years, and I hope the conference committee will take this action.●

TRIBUTE TO JESSE BROWN, SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

● Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, the veterans' community is about to lose one of its best and strongest champions—Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Jesse Brown. After 4 years as the Secretary, Jesse Brown is retiring from Government service. He will be deeply missed by millions of veterans and their families, and everyone else who has had the good fortune of working with him.

Secretary Brown is one of the staunchest advocates the veterans' community has ever known. A veteran himself, injured during the Vietnam war, he articulated passionately and

eloquently the needs of veterans, and the obligation of our Government to take care of those who served, often at great personal sacrifice. His oratory could move an audience to tears, and there was never any question but that his concern was genuine and sincere. He truly was a "veterans' veteran," as he was often called, and he fought to the last to further and protect veterans' best interests.

Jesse Brown undertook an ambitious agenda as Secretary. Under his watch, the Veterans Health Administration was reorganized into 22 Veterans Integrated Service Networks [VISNs], the VA health care system began the transition from inpatient to outpatient care, the Veterans Benefits Administration moved to reduce its tremendous backlog of cases, and benefits were extended to Persian Gulf war veterans suffering from undiagnosed illnesses and Vietnam veterans' children born with spina bifida. Most significantly, he was tremendously successful in protecting his department from some of the deep budget cuts suffered by most other Federal agencies.

Secretary Brown's departure is a great loss. I wish him every success in the years ahead—and I have every confidence that he will succeed in whatever he undertakes.●

● Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Jesse Brown, who will retire as Secretary of Veterans Affairs on July 1, 1997.

Since his appointment to this post on January 22, 1993, Secretary Brown has been the champion of our Nation's 26 million veterans. But his commitment to those who fought for this country began long before he accepted the awesome responsibility of heading the Federal Government's largest Department.

Secretary Brown's service in the Marine Corps formed the foundation for his strong commitment to veterans. He later worked for the Disabled American Veterans, where he was an advocate for the highest quality healthcare and benefits for veterans and their families. Secretary Brown translated his personal experiences into action as he accepted the charge of providing for those who have protected our country.

As a fellow veteran, I appreciate all of Secretary Brown's work on behalf of our Nation's veterans and their families. In the 4½ years since he accepted this challenging post, he has worked diligently to move the VA into the 21st century. His personal commitment to veterans has produced numerous accomplishments.

Secretary Brown has overseen the Department's first national summit on homeless veterans. He has worked to expand the Department's services to women veterans. And under his leadership, the VA has opened community based outpatient clinics, giving more veterans wider access to VA healthcare services. In all that he has done, his commitment to broadening veterans' access to the system has never faltered.

Throughout his service, Secretary Brown has gone out of his way to ensure that those who honorably served their country receive the attention, benefits, and services they deserve. Last year, Secretary Brown visited New Jersey, where he personally met with veterans to address their concerns about benefits and the VA healthcare system. After this meeting, numerous veterans from New Jersey contacted me to convey their appreciation for Secretary Brown's work on their behalf.

Mr. President, Secretary Brown's service to this country will be sorely missed. As a fellow veteran, I join all of the veterans in New Jersey and across the country in thanking him for his work and wishing him well in his future endeavors.●

TRIBUTE TO THE HONORABLE JESSE BROWN

● Mr. BRYAN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the innumerable contributions and outstanding leadership that have characterized the tenure of the Honorable Jesse Brown as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. It is with great appreciation, as well as sadness, that I speak of his accomplishments today, as his term as the chief of the second-largest agency in the Federal Government will come to an end on the first of July. Under his guidance over the past 4½ years, the Department of Veterans Affairs has undergone some of the most fundamental changes in decades. In the past, such groundbreaking reforms and restructuring may have inspired fear on Capitol Hill and in veterans' facilities across the Nation, but with Jesse Brown at the helm, the Department has undergone a transformation with support, hard-earned at times, from both budget-cutters in Congress and from veterans across the country.

When Secretary Brown took office in 1993, he was faced with an outdated health-care delivery system stretched to its limits trying to maintain too many large, aging hospitals. The Secretary rose to the challenge by closing hospitals that did not serve their patients well and beginning an overhaul of the entire VA medical system into a network of 22 regional provider regions. Within these regions, increased attention is being given to the quality of care available as well as to outpatient services. These changes, which are still taking hold in many places, demonstrate the vision that Secretary Brown brought to his work; a vision of changing with the times, but never giving up on the primary focus of providing services to veterans.

Secretary Brown's unyielding drive to ensure that veterans have access to needed services is very important to Nevada, one of only two States in the Nation where the population of veterans is growing. While my State's problems are very different than those of a Northeastern or Midwestern State,

Secretary Brown took these differences into account and has been instrumental in helping Nevada be more responsive to the needs of the men and women who have served our country. The Department of Veterans Affairs has begun to reallocate its resources so that Federal funds are made available where veterans' needs are most critical. In southern Nevada, where approximately 118,000 veterans already crowd existing facilities, new projects will allow Nevada's veterans to access doctors, counselors, and other benefits to which they are entitled. The Secretary has helped Nevada's underserved veterans gain access to the services they deserve through his active support for efforts to construct and expand desperately needed medical facilities in southern Nevada. Secretary Brown has come to the aid of Nevada's veterans during crises, as well, stepping in to help find a solution when one of the VA facilities in Nevada faced administrative problems.

While I could go on much longer just discussing Secretary Brown's contributions to Nevada's veterans, I would be amiss if I did not mention the profound impact he has had on all American veterans and their families. He has tackled the most sensitive issues facing veterans, including his work to enact laws authorizing the VA to provide compensation and treatment for Persian Gulf war veterans' undiagnosed illnesses. He also expanded services to women veterans, which is evident at the new Addeliar D. Guy III Ambulatory Care center soon to open in Las Vegas. Finally, Secretary Brown confirmed the VA's commitment to all veterans in need by convening the first summit on the issues facing homeless veterans, and followed up on this by adding homeless programs to the services provided at VA medical centers. Again, this effort has a great impact in Las Vegas, where a large number of homeless veterans have needs that have, until now, largely gone unmet. With the help of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, however, Las Vegas will soon boast a new initiative that joins hands with the city and county to provide assistance to the homeless veterans in Las Vegas.

Mr. President, I have only touched upon a few of the many positive changes and initiatives launched by Secretary Brown, and I have not even made mention of his previous service to his country as a soldier in Vietnam or as the director of the Washington office of the Disabled American Veterans. I am sure that Secretary Brown will continue to make this world more livable and more enjoyable for veterans in whatever challenges he pursues in the future, buoyed by his commitment to "putting veterans first." Whether guaranteeing a home loan for a veteran just returned from a tour overseas, streamlining health care procedures at a local walk-in clinic, or intervening to prevent the eviction of elderly VA nursing home residents, Jesse Brown

has proven that he, and the agency he led, do indeed put veterans first. When he announced his resignation, Secretary Brown said he wanted to be remembered as "someone who made a difference in the quality of veterans' lives." I speak for the veterans of Nevada, and across the country, when I say that Jesse Brown will be remembered not only for improving veterans' access to needed benefits, but also for leading this agency with skill, with compassion, and most of all with an appreciation for the noble service of our Nation's veterans. ●

BALANCED BUDGET ACT OF 1997

AMENDMENT NO. 450

● Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleague in offering this amendment.

Last year during the welfare reform debate, as part of the effort to balance the budget, the 104th Congress made dramatic cuts to programs for low-income families. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, more than 93 percent of the cuts in entitlement programs in the 104th Congress came from programs for low-income people. Congress reduced entitlement programs by \$65.6 billion over the period from 1996 to 2002.

I am deeply concerned about the extent to which legal immigrants are being harmed under the Welfare Reform act. The Act cut \$22 billion in services to legal immigrants—a full 44 percent of the overall legislation.

The House Ways and Means Committee reconciliation mark provided the least generous allocation of funding for legal immigrants as compared to the budget agreement and the Senate Finance Committee mark. The \$9 billion allocation in the Ways and Means mark violates the budget agreement, and it covers fewer people. Since it does not cover those who, in the future, could be eligible for SSI assistance, it will leave many without any means of support. According to the Social Security Administration, 125,000 fewer people will be served by the House agreement compared to the Budget Agreement. In Minnesota it puts 1,145 elderly immigrants at risk of losing benefits.

Moreover, it puts an additional 161,000 people at risk of losing their benefits because their citizenship is unknown or difficult to prove. Probably the worst provision in this agreement is that it makes an inhumane and irrational distinction among disabled people based on an arbitrary date on the calendar. If you were disabled and receiving SSI on August 22, 1996, then you retain eligibility. If not, there is no hope for receiving future benefits.

The Durbin/Wellstone amendment restores food stamp benefits to legal immigrant families with children 18 years old and under at a cost of \$750 million over 5 years. Our offset is achieved by placing limits on the amount of Federal money that States can use to off-

set their cost share requirements in the food stamp and Medicaid programs. Our amendment would take a small step toward addressing the use of these funds and target the savings into food stamp benefits for legal immigrants who have dependent children. Over 5 years, we hope to save \$1 billion, which fully covers the cost of restoring food stamp benefits.

Unlike other low-income families in this country, legal immigrants are banned from receiving food stamp benefits. Food stamps are the Nation's largest and most successful food assistance program and cuts to this program made up half of the savings in last year's welfare reform effort. According to CBO, 17 percent of the immigrants receiving food stamps are children. This means more than 150,000 children have lost access to this critical program. In Minnesota roughly 15,900 individuals are expected to lose food stamp benefits. According to INS, most of these immigrant families will naturalize within 10 years, making them eligible to apply for food stamps. CBO estimates that it will cost \$750 million to restore food stamp benefits for children 18 years and under. Senator DURBIN and I have provided an offset that achieves that amount over 5 years. No matter what your position on the overall budget deal, you must agree that no purpose is served by denying children food.

According to the Food Research and Action Center, approximately 13.6 million children under age 12 are at risk of hunger during some part of the year. FRAC reports that although families who face real issues of hunger may not be hungry every day of the month, or even every month of the year, the hunger affecting most low-income families is not a one-time or infrequent occurrence. It is characterized—and this is according to FRAC—by food shortages and chronic insecurity about whether the family will have enough food.

We are now benefiting from scientific research that points to the significance of the early years on development of the brain. A consistently nutritious diet is one of the most important if not the most important ingredient to a child reaching his or her potential. In a 1995 study entitled Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project; a Survey of Childhood Hunger in the United States, FRAC determined that undernourished children suffer from two to four times as many health problems. I quote from the survey:

Hungry children are more likely to be ill and absent from school.

The infant mortality rate is closely linked to inadequate quantity or quality in the diet of the infant's mother.

Iron deficiency anemia in children can lead to adverse health effects such as developmental and behavioral disturbances that can affect children's ability to learn and to read or do mathematics. According to the Centers for Disease Control, anemia remains a significant health problem among low-income children.

Hungry children are less likely to interact with other people or to explore or learn from their surroundings. This interferes with their ability to learn from a very early age.