

then the vote will start at 12:15. But it is hoped, so we can move this bill along, to repeat, that we can have the time yielded back and start the vote as early as 11:45.

FOREIGN OPERATIONS, EXPORT FINANCING, AND RELATED PROGRAMS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2000—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the order, the Chair lays before the Senate a report of the committee of conference on the bill (H.R. 2606) making appropriations for foreign operations, export financing, and related programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes.

The report will be stated.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2606), have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses this report, signed by a majority of the conferees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of September 27, 1999.)

Mr. REID. Mr. President, with the permission of the Senator from Pennsylvania, I ask a quorum call be initiated and the time run equally against both sides on this conference report.

Mr. SPECTER. Agreed.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senator from Oregon be allowed to speak as in morning business but the time would run against the underlying agreement on the foreign operations bill; he be allowed to speak for—5 minutes?

Mr. WYDEN. I appreciate the Senator's courtesy. If I could have 10, that would be appreciated. I know this is an important bill. I do not want to hold it up.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we need to get agreement.

The Senator is speaking for 10 minutes.

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

The Senator from Oregon.

SENIOR PRESCRIPTION INSURANCE COVERAGE EQUITY ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Nevada who has been a strong champion of the rights of sen-

iors. He and I serve on the Committee on Aging.

I take this opportunity this morning to talk about an extraordinarily important issue for the older people of this country, and that is the need to make sure senior citizens can get prescription drug coverage as part of the Medicare program.

I am especially proud that Senator OLYMPIA SNOWE and I have introduced what is now the only bipartisan prescription drug bill before the Senate, and I am hopeful in the days ahead we can get this legislation before the Senate and ensure that the millions of vulnerable older people in this country get decent prescription drug coverage under Medicare.

I believe it is time to get this issue out of the beltway, get it out of Washington, DC, and get it to the grassroots of America. That is why Senator SNOWE and I have initiated a grassroots campaign to get prescription drug coverage under Medicare.

As folks can see in the example next to me, we are hoping in the next few weeks that senior citizens and their families from across the country will send in copies of their prescription drug bills to their Senators. We think our proposal, the Senior Prescription Insurance Coverage Equity Act, known as SPICE, is the way to proceed because it is bipartisan, it is market oriented, it gives senior citizens choice in the marketplace, and uses marketplace forces to hold down costs for prescription medicine.

We use as a model the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, which is what Members of Congress and their families have as the delivery system for health care. If it is good enough for Members of the Senate, Senator SNOWE and I believe it is good enough for the older people of our country.

We are hoping that instead of this just being a discussion within the beltway, with the various interest groups on one side or the other lining up, we hope in the days ahead, as a result of senior citizens sending in copies of their prescription drug bills and their families weighing in with their legislators, we can get our bipartisan bill moving.

More than 50 Members of the Senate have already voted for the funding proposal Senator SNOWE and I advocate. We propose there ought to be a tobacco tax to fund this program. We believe that is only right, because in this country, more than \$12 billion goes out of the Medicare program each year to handle tobacco-related illnesses. We believe there is a direct connection between the funding proposal we establish and making sure older people get this benefit. With more than 50 Members of the Senate on record for the budget vote that Senator SNOWE and I offered earlier this year, we ought to be able to build on that vote and actually get this program added to Medicare.

I am especially pleased the approach Senator SNOWE and I have taken is one

that can help lower the cost of prescription drug coverage for older people. A key part of this debate is coverage, but equally as important is the need to hold down the costs of these prescriptions. We are seeing around this country that the big buyers of prescription drugs—the health maintenance organizations and the large purchasers—get a discount and senior citizens are hit with a double whammy. Not only does Medicare not cover their prescriptions, but when a senior citizen walks into a pharmacy and picks up their prescription, say, in Arkansas or Oregon or Maine, they, in effect, are subsidizing the discounts the big buyers are getting as a result of their marketplace power.

Some have proposed a system of price controls, putting Medicare in the position of buying up all the medicine and using that as their idea of holding down costs. Senator SNOWE and I think that will end up generating a lot of cost shifting on to the part of other people who are having difficulty covering their prescription drug bills.

We favor a market-oriented approach along the lines of the Federal employee health plan. We are not talking about a price control regime or a run-from-the-beltway approach to this issue. We are talking about using marketplace forces to hold down the costs of prescription drugs for our older people.

It is especially urgent now. More than 20 percent of the Nation's senior citizens are spending more than \$1,000 a year out of pocket for their prescription medicine. We have older people with incomes of \$15,000, \$16,000 a year spending \$1,000 or \$1,500 each year on their prescription drugs. Very often those seniors are not able to pick up a prescription their doctor phoned in to their neighborhood pharmacy because the senior citizen cannot afford it, and the prescription languishes for weeks at the pharmacy because they cannot pick it up.

That is what I have heard from seniors in my State of Oregon. We have heard from other seniors whose physicians tell them they should be taking three pills a day and they cannot afford that, and they start by taking two, and then they take one. Eventually they get sicker and they need much more expensive care.

In fact, the pharmaceuticals now and the medicines of the future are going to be preventive drugs. They are going to be drugs that help lower blood pressure and help us deal with cholesterol problems. As a result, in the long term, we are going to save significant dollars by preventing expensive institutionalizations and hospital services as a result of adding immediate prescription drug coverage to the Medicare program. Clearly, this benefit needs to be paid for.

The proposal Senator SNOWE and I have offered will generate more than \$70 billion in the next few years to add this benefit to the program. I am very hopeful the Senate will move on a bipartisan basis to tackle this issue.

There are many, certainly, in Washington, DC, who think the prescription drug issue is too complicated and too political to deal with now, that we should wait until after the election. Senator SNOWE and I reject that approach. It is more than a year until the next election. We are hoping senior citizens, just as this poster next to me says, will send in copies of their prescription drug bills to their Senators. Tell the Members of the Senate exactly why this issue is important to them, why the lack of prescription drug coverage is causing them a hardship, and help Senator SNOWE and I ignite a grassroots movement to ensure that prescription drug coverage does become part of the Medicare program.

In effect, it is time for a wake-up call to the Congress. Some of the naysayers and those who say we ought to put this issue off I think are missing the real needs of the Nation's older people. If you have an income of \$15,000 or \$16,000 and you are spending \$1,500 a year for prescription drugs, if you are giving up other essentials, such as electricity, to pay for your prescription drugs, you cannot afford to wait until after the next election.

It may be a luxury for people here in the beltway to wait until after the next election to talk about the need to come up with a practical solution to covering older people with their prescriptions. Senator SNOWE and I think waiting is not a luxury that the millions of vulnerable, older people in this country have. They cannot afford to wait.

We are hoping, as a result of this campaign we have launched in the last week to have folks send in a copy of their prescription drug bills, that this can serve as a wakeup call to this Senate and this Congress that the time to act is now.

We hope the Senate will choose the proposal we have developed. Undoubtedly, there are other very good ideas. I am sure we will hear from seniors, when they send in copies of their bills, about the best way to address this issue legislatively. Ours is a marketplace-oriented approach. It is based on the kind of program that Members of the Senate have.

We hope, in the days ahead, seniors from across the country will send us copies of their prescription drug bills. We want to see this coverage added now. We want to see the Senate address this in a bipartisan way.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and ask unanimous consent the time be evenly charged.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FOREIGN OPERATIONS, EXPORT FINANCING, AND RELATED PROGRAMS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2000—CONFERENCE REPORT—Continued

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, to my amazement, we received a letter indicating the President might want to veto the foreign operations appropriations bill, a stunning development, it seems to me, almost inexplicable.

This bill, while not as much as the President requested, is as large as he signed last year and includes a number of items important not only to many of us but to him as well.

For example, if this bill were to ultimately be vetoed, the President would be vetoing—would be stopping—aid to the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union of \$735 million; developmental assistance, which was \$83 million over his request in this bill that he is threatening to veto; narcotics assistance at \$285 million, which is \$24 million above last year, the bill that he signed; for AIDS, \$180 million to fight AIDS, which is \$55 million above the bill that he signed last year; for UNICEF, an important program of the United Nations, there is \$110 million in this bill for UNICEF, which is \$5 million more than in the bill last year that he signed.

Obviously, we continue the Middle East earmarks to Israel and Egypt. Vetoing this bill would deny \$3 billion to Israel. I think it is important to note that The American Israel Public Affairs Committee supports this bill. AIPAC supports this bill. I ask unanimous consent that letter of support be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

AIPAC,

Washington, DC, October 6, 1999.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,
United States Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN MCCONNELL: We are writing to express our support for the Conference Report on HR 2606, the FY 2000 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, which contains funding for Israel's regular aid package, including provisions for early disbursement, offshore procurement and refugee resettlement. The Middle East peace process is moving forward with both Israel and the Palestinians committed to resolving issues between them within a year. It is important that Congress support Israel as this process moves ahead, and we therefore also hope and urge that Congress find a way to fund assistance to the Wye River signatories before the end of this year.

Sincerely,

LIONEL KAPLAN,
President.
HOWARD KOHR,
Executive Director.
BRAD GORDON,
Legislative Director.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, other items in this bill of interest: Child health, immunization, and education initiatives. For Kosovo—we fought a war there a few months ago—there is \$535 million for Kosovo and for

some of the countries surrounding Kosovo that were impacted by the war that was fought there. That is \$142 million more than the President requested.

In addition, there is money in this bill for the environment, for biodiversity, for tropical rain forests, unique ecosystems initiatives. All of that will be denied if the President vetoes this bill.

For Lebanon and Cyprus, to help in the reconciliation process there, there is \$15 million for Lebanon and \$15 million for Cyprus.

Infectious diseases, especially polio and TB campaigns, which have been priorities of Senator LEAHY, all of that would be vetoed by this bill.

Funds for Georgia, for Ukraine, for Armenia, for Poland—all of which is supported vigorously by Americans of Georgian, Ukrainian, Armenian, and Polish descent—all of that would not go forward if this bill were vetoed. The vote on this bill, when it went through the Senate—and it is not all that different now from the way it was when it cleared the Senate—was 97-2. This is virtually the same bill, at \$12.6 billion, which protects virtually all of the Senate priorities passed here at 97-2. On the threat reduction initiative, we have spent \$5.9 billion in Russia over the years. There are no restrictions on the \$735 million we provide for that area of the world preventing funding of this new \$250 million initiative to control the nuclear problem there.

On development assistance, the President claims it is dramatically underfunded. In fact, we not only exceeded last year's level—that is the bill President Clinton signed—we exceeded last year's level of spending and we have exceeded his request for this year. The President requested \$83 million less than the conference has provided.

The veto threat to the Senator from Kentucky is inexplicable. It doesn't make any sense, unless this important bill for the assistance of Israel and Egypt and Armenia and Georgia and Ukraine and a number of other worthwhile causes that are supported around the world is somehow being made part of a larger strategy by the administration to veto all of these bills.

This bill enjoys strong support from AIPAC, from Armenian Americans, from Georgian Americans, Polish Americans, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, and Ukrainian Americans. They are but a few of the Americans who appreciate this bill.

As I indicated, all of these items are threatened by the President's inexplicable decision to threaten to veto this bill.

Finally, let me say, before turning to my friend and colleague from Vermont, Senator LEAHY, I don't know where the President wants to get more money for this bill. Are we going to take it out of the Social Security trust fund to spend on foreign aid? Is that what the President is suggesting we do? Does President Clinton want us to take money