

For working individuals with disabilities, the conference agreement extends access, beyond what is allowed in current law, to Medicare. In addition, the legislation before us today retains several key provisions from S. 331, including, the authority to fund Medicaid demonstration projects to provide access to health care to working individuals with a potentially severe disability; the State Infrastructure Grant Program, to assist states in reaching and helping individuals with disabilities who work; work incentive planners and protection and advocacy provisions; and finally, most of the provisions in the Ticket to Work Program.

In order to control the cost of this legislation, compromises were made. Although the purpose of the State Infrastructure Grant Program and the Medicaid Demonstration Grant Program remain the same, the terms and conditions of these grants were altered in conference. As a result, states are not required to offer a Medicaid buy-in option to individuals with disabilities on Social Security, who work and exceed income limits in current law, prior to receiving an Infrastructure or a Medicaid Demonstration Grant.

Also in Conference, the extended period of eligibility for Medicare for working individuals with disabilities has been changed from 24 to 78 months. During this extended period, the federal government is to cover the cost of the Part A premium of Medicare for a working individual with a disability, who is eligible for Medicare. S. 331 would have extended such coverage for an individual's working life, if he or she became eligible during a 6-year time period.

I would like to note two changes to the Ticket to Work program made during Conference. The new legislation shifts the appointment authority for the members of the Work Incentives Advisory Panel from the Commissioner of Social Security to the President and Congress. In addition, language regarding the reimbursements between employment networks and state vocational rehabilitation agencies was deleted in Conference. The new legislation gives the Commissioner of Social Security the authority to address these matters through regulation.

Although several changes have been made from the original Work Incentives bill, I am still very pleased with what we are adopting today. This is legislation that makes sense, and it will contribute to the well-being of millions of Americans, including those with disabilities and their friends, their families, and their co-workers. Today's vote provides us the opportunity to bring responsible change to federal policy and to eliminate a misguided result of the current system—if you don't work, you get health care; if you do work, you don't get health care. The Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 makes living the American dream a reality for millions of individuals with disabilities, who will no

longer be forced to choose between the health care coverage they so strongly need and the economic independence they so dearly desire.

In closing, I would like to thank the many people who contributed to reaching this day. I especially thank the conferees, Majority Leader LOTT, Senators ROTH and MOYNIHAN, and in the House, Majority Leader ARMEY, and Congressmen ARCHER, BLILEY, RANGEL, and DINGELL. I also thank their staff who worked so closely in effort to reach this day. From my staff, I thank Pat Morrissey, Lu Zeph, Leah Menzies, Chris Crowley, and Kim Monk. I want to recognize and extend my appreciation to the staff members of my three fellow sponsors of this bill; Connie Garner in Senator KENNEDY's office, Jennifer Baxendell and Alexander Vachon with Senator ROTH, and Kristen Testa, John Resnick, and Edwin Park from Senator MOYNIHAN's staff. Finally, I wish to thank Ruth Ernst with the Senate Legislative Counsel for her drafting skill and substantive expertise, her willingness to meet time tables, and most of all, her patience.

In addition to staff, we received countless hours of assistance and advice from the Work Incentives Task Force of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities. These individuals worked tirelessly to educate Members of Congress about the need for and the effects of this legislation.

Finally, I would like to urge my colleagues in both chambers to set aside any concerns about peripheral matters and to focus on the central provisions of this legislation. Let's focus on what today's vote will mean to the 9.5 million individuals with disabilities across the nation. At last, these individuals will be able to work, to preserve their health, to support their families, to become independent, and most importantly, to contribute to their communities, the economy, and the nation. We are making a statement, a noble statement and we must do the right thing. Let's send this bill to the President.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, under the unanimous consent agreement, how much time remains in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNETT). We are in morning business until 1 o'clock, with the time equally divided between the two sides.

Mr. DURBIN. The remaining time on the Democratic side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Twenty-six minutes.

LEGISLATIVE LANDFILL

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, as we reflect at the end of this legislative session on our accomplishments, it is my belief that there are very few things we can go back home to tell the American people we achieved.

100 Senators and 435 Members of the House of Representatives came to

Washington, DC, at the beginning of the year and listened closely to President Clinton's State of the Union Address where he outlined a program and some objectives, many stood and cheered. The applause lines were frequent during the course of that speech. People of both political parties left the State of the Union Address saying they were now energized and invigorated to go forward and address the issues facing America, and we began the legislative process.

For me, it is the 17th time I have been through this. It is hard for me to remember another session of the Congress as unproductive as this session of the Congress. When it came to issues that the people and families across America care about, this Congress refused to do anything. This wasn't a titanic struggle between the Republican conservative agenda and the progressive agenda of the Democrats where we brought issues to the floor and fought over amendments from one side to the other. That is what we are supposed to see on Capitol Hill. That didn't happen because there was no agenda on the other side. The Republican leadership had no agenda.

Recently, a Republican Congressman said we considered this year a "legislative timeout." When timeouts occur during the course of an NFL football game, most people leave the room and go to the refrigerator; if America's families had left the room and gone to the refrigerator, they would have spent a lot of time there this year if they were waiting for Congress to do something. We didn't do it. We didn't respond. Now we have to go home, as we should, and explain it.

Let me state some of the issues we failed to act on this year, issues that make a difference to families across America. The Patients' Bill of Rights: The relationship of a person, a family, a business, to their health insurance company. That is pretty basic. When we asked America's families, they said that is the No. 1 concern. We want to make certain, when we go in a doctor's office, that the doctor makes the decision, not some clerk at an insurance company off in Topeka, KS.

I know from my experience in Illinois, as most others know from their own personal experiences, many times doctors are being overruled. I can recall a doctor who said to me a mother came in the office with an infant and the baby had been complaining of a headache on the right side of his head for several months. The doctor asked if it was always complaining about one side of the head, and the mother said yes. The doctor thought: I had better take an MRI to see if there might be a brain tumor. Before he said that to the mother, he looked at her file for the name of her insurance company. He said, excuse me, left the room, got on the phone and called the insurance company. He said: The mother presents herself with an infant complaining of headaches for several weeks and

months on one side of the head. It is my medical decision and opinion we should have an MRI to determine whether there is a possibility of a brain tumor.

The voice on the other end of the phone said: No; no. The insurance company that pays for the bills declines that procedure.

That doctor had to walk back to that room and not even tell the mother what had happened. He was bound by his contract not even to disclose that his medical judgment had been overruled by an insurance company clerk.

That is the state of health care in America. Families who go into those doctors' offices, confident the patient-doctor relationship is a sacred one that can be trusted, are beginning to think twice. They appeal to Members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans: Do something; restore our faith in our medical system. Restore quality health care. Pass a Patients' Bill of Rights.

No, not in this Congress. This Congress and the Senate on July 15 passed a bill friendly to the insurance companies—as if they needed another friend on Capitol Hill—a bill which, frankly, didn't address the most basic issues families worry over every single day.

I won't even get into the question of expanding medical insurance coverage. We wouldn't even utter those words on Capitol Hill for fear it might bring down charges of radicalism, the idea that the 44 million uninsured Americans who grow in number every year might have their Government care enough to do something. We are not in that business with the Republican-controlled Congress. We don't talk about those things—like the aunt who is somewhere off in the distance, never referred to by a family.

We don't talk about medical coverage for all Americans. Families talk about it. Families talk about their kids turning 23 years of age, coming off the health insurance policies of their moms and dads, and whether they have a chance to be covered. Families talk about whether or not someone with a preexisting condition can find insurance in this country. We don't talk about it in Congress, no. The insurance companies don't want Members to talk about it. The special interests ruled this session of Congress.

We see in the Republican legislative landfill of the 106th Congress the Patients' Bill of Rights, an issue we failed to address.

The nuclear test ban treaty: Just a few weeks ago, possible one of the worst decisions made by Congress in a decade, a decision to turn down a treaty where the United States not only would have the moral leadership in the world but enact a treaty that backs it up and says to countries around the world: If you are not a nuclear power, don't become one. If you have nuclear weapons, don't test them. Let's stop this nuclear arms race in place.

This nuclear test ban treaty failed in the Senate on a largely partisan vote.

It was a sad day for America. It was a sad day for a country which has tried to lead the world and say to countries such as India and Pakistan, stop what you are doing, don't keep this arms race going and develop nuclear weapons that could mushroom into a war that would destroy not only people in those two countries but in many other nations. This Congress, this Senate, failed to enact a nuclear test ban treaty.

We failed to enact any legislation to deal with school construction. Take a look at the numbers: There will be more kids showing up for classes in the next 10 years than we have been serving in the last 10 or 20 years. Those kids need teachers, they need classrooms, they need modern schools, schools where they have the electricity to make certain they can sustain the computer technology, schools that are safe, schools where kids have a positive learning environment. When the President made this proposal for school construction, it was greeted with disbelief and disapproval on the other side of the aisle. We have done nothing in this session of Congress to deal with school construction.

Campaign finance reform: Is there a more basic issue for the future of Congress? Will we ever change the current system which has become a bidding war among special interests where Members of the Senate such as myself literally have to be on the phone day and night, begging for money for a campaign that costs millions of dollars? If you are not independently wealthy and cannot write a big check to sustain your own campaign in the Senate, you spend most of your time begging for money. Is that what Americans want in the Senate or the House of Representatives? I don't think so.

A bipartisan bill—Senator JOHN McCAIN, a Republican, of Arizona, and Senator RUSS FEINGOLD, a Democrat from Wisconsin—said we can clean up this system, but this Congress failed to enact meaningful campaign finance reform. Only 55 Senators—45 Democrats and 10 Republicans—came forward in support of this most basic change in reform.

As part of the legislative landfill of the 106th Congress, Republicans were successful in not passing campaign finance reform.

Minimum wage increase? The minimum wage in this country is \$5.15 an hour. When you calculate that out, it means a little over \$10,000 a year in income. Can any of us consider a life on \$10,000 a year and what it would mean? Keep in mind, these are men and women who get up and go to work every single day and make \$5.15 an hour. Inflation eats away at it, at a wage that was already too low to be livable. We tried this year to increase the minimum wage by 50 cents an hour each year over the next 2 years, saying it is only fair that working men and women have that help from their Government. We were resisted on the Re-

publican side of the aisle. Ultimately, they came up with their own package. They do not do it over 2 years; they do it over 3 years, which costs those wage earners \$1,200 a year in income to take that approach. Mr. President, \$1,200? You might say that is not that big a deal. It is if you are making \$10,000 a year; it is a very big deal.

The Republican approach representing special interests in stopping the minimum wage increase prevailed. They also added in there some tax breaks that, frankly, cannot be taken seriously because they did not pay for them. There we have it—the minimum wage issue into the landfill.

This is one you will remember, the juvenile crime control bill. You will remember it because it came up right after Columbine High School. It was an effort by the Senate to pass a sensible gun control law. When the final vote was cast, it was 50-50. Vice President Al Gore came to the floor, broke the tie, and we enacted the bill which said as follows: When people buy guns at gun shows, we want to know if they have a history of violent mental illness or a criminal record.

In an effort to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and kids, we passed a sensible gun control measure, sent it across the Rotunda to the House of Representatives, where it literally died because the National Rifle Association and the gun lobby decided they did not want to pass any gun control bills this session. This Nation, which was shocked by the occurrences at Columbine and so many other schools, had a chance to pass sensible gun control legislation and failed. We will go home now to face our constituents, many of whom live in cities where gun violence is a commonplace occurrence, and have to tell them this Congress failed to pass any sensible gun control legislation.

Smaller class size—thank goodness the President prevailed in his negotiations. The President's goal, and one I share, is to reduce class size in the early grades so quality teachers can meet with kids right when they are starting their education and help them along. You take the kids who are the best and the brightest and you give them the biggest challenges. You take those who may be suffering from some learning disability, you diagnose their problem and try to deal with it at an early age. You take the kids who do not learn as quickly and give them special attention. For teachers to achieve that, they need smaller class sizes. If you put 30 kids in a classroom, the teacher is lucky to maintain discipline, let alone meet the special needs of individual students.

So the President said, and I agree: We need to focus 100,000 teachers into reducing class size across America. Until a few days ago, the Republicans had opposed this. Finally, the President prevailed. Finally, we are moving forward on this initiative which we started last year that serves school districts all across America, not just in

the cities but in the towns and suburbs alike.

Look at the efforts to help family farmers. We finally came through with that on a bipartisan basis. It is one of the things we achieved this year. But it begs the question, to leave it at that, because next year if we do not change the basic Federal farm policy, the so-called Freedom to Farm Act, we are going to see a rerun, unfortunately, of what we saw this year—farmers literally struggling to survive. As prices across the world have plummeted, they cannot make a decent income.

In my home State of Illinois, a State that has a very strong farm sector, just a few years ago the average net farm income for a farmer was about \$48,000 a year. This year it will be about \$25,000. That is about half. But \$13,000 of the \$25,000 will come from Federal payments. The other about \$12,000 will come in farm operations. We cannot sustain a farm economy where half the income of farmers in Illinois and Minnesota or Nebraska comes from the Federal Treasury. The law has to be changed, and this year we did not take up a change in the law as we should have.

The last point I would like to make before I yield to my colleague from Minnesota is this. The Patients' Bill of Rights is an issue we have to return to as the highest priority in the next Congress. When you consider the lives of people who are dependent on this action, you understand the severity of it. I will tell one quick story.

Take a look at this little girl here. She is Theresa. She lives in Yorkville, IL. Her dad is a police officer and her mom stays at home to look after her. She suffers from a rare disease known as spinal muscular atrophy. It is a very debilitating disease. As you can see, she is on a ventilator, and I met a couple of kids just like this. This is what her mother says:

She was hospitalized from September 2nd last year until February 15 of this year due to fighting the insurance company for certain provisions we could not do without in our home.

We had to fight and fight with the insurance company for things the doctors had said were needed [for Theresa.] So we fought for 2½ months. We eventually did get everything that we needed, except it was a very long battle.

Can you imagine having your family separated that long because the insurance company did not want to help?

Theresa caught RSV in the hospital while we were waiting for the appeal to go through. That is why she now has [a ventilator and tracheotomy.]

That is a real life family. Theresa's dad is a policeman. Theresa and her family would not be protected by the Republican version of the Patients' Bill of Rights. They would not have the benefit of an appeals process in a timely fashion so they could get a good answer, a sensible medical answer for this little girl. Instead, they are embroiled in month after month of weary debate with the insurance company. That is

health care in America for too many American families. This Congress has failed, utterly failed to address this critical issue.

I yield the floor.

Several Senators addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky is recognized. We are going from side to side.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair. I wonder if I can ask unanimous consent to follow the Senator from Kentucky?

Mr. INHOFE. Reserving the right to object, I inquire of the Chair, it is my understanding we had until the hour of 1 o'clock equally divided. I ask how much time is remaining on each side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On the Republican side, there are 22 minutes 37 seconds. On the Democratic side, there are 9 minutes 33 seconds.

Mr. INHOFE. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the Senator from Minnesota will be recognized following the Senator from Kentucky.

THE TICKET TO WORK AND WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of the work incentives and ticket to work legislation. This is a day I have looked forward to for a long time.

It is a great day for the disabled in America. By passing this legislation, we are going to make it easier for them to return to work and become self-sufficient. We are going to give those who want to try to return to work the tools they need to support themselves and to escape from the dependency on a monthly Government check.

For years, the Social Security disability program has provided a vital safety net to assist those who fall on hard times and need help when they become sick or injured and cannot support themselves. It has done this job well. But for the many disabled people who have wanted to return to work and could be able to work, the disability program has not worked as well. It has not properly equipped them to return to the workforce. It has not given them the tools they need to move off the disability rolls. In fact, fewer than 1 percent of those who go on the disability rolls—that is currently 4.5 million people—never return to work because the program does not provide an adequate support network or resources for these Americans to move back into the workforce.

For these disabled people, the disability program has become a black hole. Once they fall in, they cannot escape. The bill we hope to pass today or tomorrow finally gives these Americans new hope, the ladder they need to climb out of that hole. The Ticket To Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act modernizes the disability program and moves it into the modern age and provides more options for the

disabled who want to work. It provides them with a ticket that can be used to help acquire skills to reenter the workforce.

Under the old system, these workers had only one option if they wanted to return to work; they had to work through their State vocational rehabilitation programs. This option will still be open to them, but now they will also be able to use their "ticket" to go to other provider networks and employers to obtain skills and jobs. In short, the "ticket" expands opportunity for training and choices for rehabilitation for the disabled, and gives them the ability to tap into the power of the free market.

This legislation also addresses the most pressing need for most of those who want to leave the disability rolls and return to work—the availability of adequate health care. Many of these potential workers continue to require a high degree of medical care even after they return to work. Obtaining this care—and paying for it—is often a high hurdle to cross, especially for those who move back to the workplace in entry and lower-level positions. Under the bill we are dealing with today, we expand continued Medicare coverage for the disabled and also increase Medicaid funding to the States to help them address the problems.

All in all, this bill is win-win. It is a winner for the disabled community and a winner for the American taxpayers and all of us who pay Social Security taxes. The Congressional Budget Office tells us that for every 1 percent of disability recipients who return to work, the Social Security disability trust fund saves \$3 billion. That is serious money. If this legislation only works partly as well as we expect, it will make a tremendous difference for the future of the trust fund and our ability to look after the neediest Americans.

It's been almost 5 years since Congress began looking into problems with the disability program. In 1995, when I was the chairman of the House Social Security Subcommittee, we began holding hearings on possible changes we could make to Social Security to help the disabled. After those hearings, former Congresswoman Barbara Kelenley and myself wrote reform legislation that passed in the House in 1998 by a vote of 410-1. While my bill died in the Senate last year because Senator KENNEDY put a hold on my bill and some shenanigans by the White House, it is at the core of the legislation we are passing today and I am very proud of that. We have worked very hard to make sure the ticket-to-work portion of this reflects the bill that passed the House last year 410-1.

This is a good bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it. It will truly make a difference for many Americans who need it the most, and I think it will stand as one of the most significant pieces of legislation to pass during this Congress.

I yield the floor.