

120,000 teachers already in Ohio, this program at best yields only 1.5% increase in the number of teachers in my state.

In fact, even if the President gets all the money he wants, 47% of Ohio's public school districts and community schools will not even receive enough money from the President's program to hire a single teacher. Not a single one.

The Clinton class size reduction proposal undermines local control and the ability of school districts to spend money where it is needed most. But it goes to the point that the Clinton-Gore administration wants to be all things to all people.

I say to my colleagues, if we really want to do something for education, then we should live up to the federal commitment to IDEA.

In 1975, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a program designed to help mainstream young men and women with disabilities so they could obtain a quality education. Congress thought it was such a national priority, that it promised that the Federal Government would pay up to 40 percent of the cost of this program.

However, through fiscal year 2000, the most that Washington provided to our school districts under IDEA is 12.6 percent of the educational costs for each handicapped child. The remainder of the cost for IDEA falls on State and local governments.

Earlier this year, the Senate passed two amendments that I offered regarding IDEA. The first said that Washington should live up to its commitment to fund IDEA at the 40% level before it allocates new education money.

The second would allow school districts to use federal money for IDEA. Or, if the district wanted to spend the money on new teachers or new facilities, they could do so.

If the Federal Government was fully funding IDEA, most of the education initiatives the President and my colleagues are proposing—school construction, after-school programs, and new teachers—could be and likely would be taken care of at the State and local level.

The Federal Government does have important responsibilities like national defense, infrastructure, Medicare and Social Security and we must also look at real federal priorities such as prescription drugs and responding to the cries of our health care system that has been short changed by the 1997 Balanced Budget Act. However, Washington must figure out how to sustain paying for its responsibilities before making new commitments.

Because of the President's spending programs, the Labor HHS appropriations bill is, at last count, already at \$113 billion. Last year, we spent \$96 billion for the same bill. That's nearly an 18 percent increase.

This appropriations bill contains more than \$43 billion for the Department of Education. In the President's

own budget, he asked for only \$40 billion. Still, that is almost double the \$21.1 billion in discretionary education spending allocated by the Federal Government just 10 years ago in fiscal year 1991, and nearly 5 times the \$8.2 billion spent on discretionary education spending 25 years ago in 1976.

The President and my colleagues across the aisle must stop acting as if they are the Nation's school board, trying to fund every education program possible.

I believe our State and local leaders should be given the flexibility they need to spend their Federal education dollars to live up to our obligations with respect to IDEA, freeing them to address state and local education needs that have not yet been met.

It is my hope that in the waning days of this Congress, we will find the strength to recognize what is a federal responsibility and what is not and act accordingly. We can no longer count on the President to do so: it is up to us.

OBJECTION TO PROCEEDING TO H.R. 4020

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to state my objection to any unanimous consent request for the Senate to proceed to or adopt H.R. 4020, authorizing the expansion of the boundaries of Sequoia National Park to include Dillonwood Giant Sequoia Grove, unless or until S. 2691, to provide further protections for the watershed of the Little Sandy River as part of the Bull Run Watershed Management Unit, Oregon, is discharged, unamended, from the House of Representatives Resources Committee and passed, unamended, by the House of Representatives. I do so consistent with the commitment I have made to explain publicly any so-called "holds" that I may place on legislation.

S. 2691 is a bipartisan bill, authored by myself and Senator SMITH of Oregon, and supported by all the members of Oregon's congressional delegation. It passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, as well as the entire Senate, unanimously. This legislation protects the current and future drinking water source for the city of Portland, home to one in four Oregonians.

Despite its broad support, and my personal appeal to the Resources Committee, that committee has failed to act on it. Oregonians expect their elected representatives will act responsibly to protect Portland's drinking water source. As a result, I cannot agree to H.R. 4020 until S. 2691 clears the House of Representatives unamended.

THE BANKRUPTCY REFORM BILL

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I strongly believe that reform of our bankruptcy laws is necessary. During the 105th and 106th Congress, I have supported legislation to reform bank-

ruptcy laws and end the abuse of the system. However, I am very disappointed that I am unable to support the conference report of the Bankruptcy Reform Bill because I believe it is unfair and unbalanced, was completed without appropriate consideration by the Minority party, includes an inequitable homestead provision and is unfair to many working families.

I am very concerned that the decision to file for bankruptcy is too often used as an economic tool to avoid responsibility for unsound business decisions and reckless acts by both individuals and businesses. There has been a decline in the stigma of filing for bankruptcy and appropriate changes are necessary to ensure that bankruptcy is no longer considered a lifestyle choice.

This legislation includes a number of important reforms which I support. I am pleased that the small business provisions originally included in the Senate bill have been changed to give small businesses adequate time to develop a reorganization plan during bankruptcy proceedings. I had previously included an amendment to the Senate bill that increased this time for small businesses. I am also pleased that the conference report includes my amendment to expand the credit committee membership under Chapter 11 bankruptcies to include small businesses. I believe this will ensure better access and information for small businesses creditors. Unfortunately, reasonable and necessary reforms were included in a bill that on the whole fails to take a balanced approach to bankruptcy reform. I had hoped that through a legitimate legislative process we would arrive at a compromise that would have ended the abuses but still provided our most vulnerable citizens with adequate protections. Instead, I believe that the conference report protects wealthy debtors by allowing them to use overly broad homestead exemptions to shield assets from their creditors. The Senate passed, by a bipartisan vote of 76-22, an amendment to create a \$100,000 nationwide cap on any homestead exemption. However, this provision was not included in the Conference Report. Instead, the conferees included a meaningless cap with a two-year residency requirement that wealthy debtors could easily avoid. Moreover, the bill's safe harbor is illusory and will not benefit individuals in most need of help. Because the safe harbor is based on the combined income of the debtor and the debtor's spouse, many single mothers who are separated from their husbands and who are not receiving child support will not be able to take advantage of the safe harbor provision.

I am also very disappointed that the conference report does not include an amendment offered by Senator COLLINS and myself, which was included in the Senate bill, that would make Chapter 12 of the Bankruptcy Code, which now applies to family farmers, applicable

for fishermen. I believe that this provision would have made bankruptcy a more effective tool to help fishermen reorganize effectively and allow them to keep fishing while they do so.

In addition to its failure to protect many consumers, the bill fails to require that the credit industry share responsibility for reducing the number of bankruptcy cases. It does not require specific disclosures on monthly credit card statements that would show the time it would take to pay off a balance and the cost of credit if only minimum payments are made. It also does nothing to discourage lenders from further increasing the debt of consumers who are already overburdened with debt.

Finally, this bill is the result of a conference process that violated and deprived the rights of Senators. In October, the House appointed conferees for the Bankruptcy Reform Act and without holding a conference meeting, the Majority filed a conference report striking international security legislation and replacing with a reference to a bankruptcy reform bill introduced earlier that same day. This makes a mockery of the legislative process and demeans the United States Senate.

I am hopeful that during the 107th Congress, we can develop bipartisan legislation that would encourage responsibility and reduce abuses of the bankruptcy system.

BBA CUTS TO MEDICARE PROVIDERS

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I rise today to bring attention to the important issue of the Balanced Budget Act, BBA, of 1997, its revision in 1999, and the importance of providing further relief to the many patients and providers who have been negatively affected by its implementation.

The BBA included a series of cuts to Medicare providers, including hospitals, nursing homes, and home health agencies. Though intended to cut about \$112 billion from Medicare over the five-year period from 1998 to 2001, recent estimates indicate that over twice that amount will be cut by the BBA. And although Congress restored about \$16 billion in funding to Medicare in 1999, much work remains to be done. Particularly in rural America, Congress should restore funding to Medicare programs for telehealth, hospital and home health care, among others.

Nationwide, 25 percent of seniors live in rural areas. And though the BBA has hit all hospitals hard, rural facilities have suffered disproportionately from the 1997 legislation. According to a June report by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, small rural hospitals have significantly lower operating margins than rural facilities, on average 0.4 and 3.8 percent, respectively. Congress will do America's rural hospitals a great disservice by not enacting further BBA relief this year.

With respect to telemedicine, a means of providing care for Medicare

beneficiaries with the use of advanced telecommunications equipment, Congress can act this year to further the use of this important tool. Mr. President, in my state of Montana, where over 75 percent of seniors live in rural areas, there is no psychiatrist east of Billings—an area the size of the State of Florida. Telemedicine could work wonders toward providing rural beneficiaries with access to specialty care, including psychiatric care. Although Congress mandated telehealth reimbursement as part of the BBA, the scope of that reimbursement is very limited.

We should also provide relief for home health care, one of the areas hit hardest by the BBA. Originally scheduled for a \$16 billion cut, home health payments under Medicare were actually reduced by more than \$68 billion, over four times the original amount intended. We need to preserve access to home care services by eliminating the scheduled 15 percent additional reduction in Medicare reimbursement. We should also provide 10 percent bonus payments to rural home care agencies, a provision that was included in both the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means BBA relief bills this year.

Mr. President, Congress should not let politics and partisan priorities to interfere with providing a basic human need to the people of our country. I urge my colleagues join me by acting on further BBA relief this year.

ERGONOMICS

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, OSHA has been attempting to implement an ergonomics standard for the past ten years. But each year, Congress has delayed the standard. And now, even though a bipartisan group of appropriators agreed to a reasonable compromise on this issue late Sunday night, the Republican leadership rejected it—because the business lobbyists demanded it and insisted that millions of workers wait even longer for a safe and healthy workplace.

Each year, 1.7 million workers suffer from ergonomic injuries, and nearly 600,000 workers lose a day or more of work because of these injuries suffered on the job. Ergonomic injuries account for over one-third of all serious job-related injuries.

These injuries are painful and often crippling. They range from carpal tunnel syndrome, to severe back injuries, to disorders of the muscles and nerves. Carpal tunnel syndrome keeps workers off the job longer than any other workplace injury. This injury alone causes workers to lose an average of more than 25 days, compared to 17 days for fractures and 20 days for amputations.

The ergonomics issue is also a women's issue, because women workers are disproportionately affected by these injuries. Women make up 46 percent of the overall workforce—but in 1998 they accounted for 64 percent of repetitive motion injuries and 71 percent of carpal tunnel cases.

The good news is that these injuries are preventable. The National Academy of Sciences and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health have both found that obvious adjustments in the workplace can prevent workers from suffering ergonomic injuries and illnesses.

Congress has a responsibility to ensure that the nation's worker protection laws keep pace with changes in the workforce. Early in this century, the industrial age created deadly new conditions for large numbers of the nation's workers. When miners were killed or maimed in explosion after explosion, we enacted the Federal Coal Mine Safety and Health Act. As workplace hazards became more subtle, but no less dangerous, we responded by passing the Occupational Safety and Health Act to address hazards such as asbestos and cotton dust.

Now, as the workplace moves from the industrial to the information age, our laws must evolve again to address the emerging dangers to American workers. Ergonomic injuries are one of the principal hazards of the modern American workplace—and we owe it to the 600,000 workers who suffer serious ergonomic injuries each year to address this problem now.

Ergonomic injuries affect the lives of working men and women across the country. They injure nurses who regularly lift and move patients. They injure construction workers who lift heavy objects. They harm assembly-line workers whose tasks consist of constant repetitive motions. They injure data entry workers who type on computer keyboards all day. Even if we are not doing these jobs ourselves, we all know people who do. They are mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, friends and neighbors—and they deserve our help.

We need to help workers like Beth Piknick of Hyannis, Massachusetts, who was an intensive care nurse for 21 years, before a preventable back injury required her to have a spinal fusion operation and spend two years in rehabilitation. Although she wants to work, she can no longer do so. In her own words, "The loss of my ability to take care of patients led to a clinical depression. . . . My ability to take care of patients—the reason I became a nurse—is gone. My injury—and all the losses it has entailed—were preventable."

We need to help workers like Elly Leary, an auto assembler at the now-closed General Motors Assembly plant in Framingham, Massachusetts. Like many, many of her co-workers, she suffered a series of ergonomic injuries—including carpal tunnel syndrome and tendinitis. Like others, she tried switching hands to do her job. She tried varying the sequence of her routine. She even bid on other jobs. But nothing helped. Today, years after her injuries, when she wakes up in the morning, her hands are in a claw-like shape. To get them to open, she has to run hot water on them.