

years, or whatever, we are going to pay that off. Then we can take so much every year to do that, and we are dedicated to doing it. That is not the approach taken by the administration.

There is great concern about tax reduction. I certainly believe we ought to take care of adequate spending, protecting Social Security, paying down the debt, but then what is wrong with tax reduction? That is where the money came from. Just because there is more money coming in as a result of a stronger economy doesn't mean we necessarily have an obligation to spend it, which is what the other side often says we ought to do. Much of the tax reduction is just a fairness issue. For instance, the marriage tax. Why is it that two people who are making a certain amount of money as two single persons get married and they have to pay more taxes on the same amount of earnings? That is very unfair. Part of what we talk about in tax reduction is a matter of fairness. Part of it is also incentives to do other things.

So we will be talking about the Republican budget that will be coming before this Congress, in which we safeguard Social Security, shield Medicare, pay down the national debt, and at the same time work on the fairness issue. We will be protecting that surplus by not spending it, which is unique, only happening in the last several years. It strengthens Medicare by increasing—as we did last year and again this year—some of the reductions that were made in the balanced budget amendment. We will reduce the national debt, hopefully, by using operational funds to do that, as well as Social Security dollars. We will provide tax fairness for families. We need to do that. We need to balance the budget again, as we have for about the third time in 40 years. So that is a very good thing.

This budget, over time, reduces the debt by \$177 billion, wipes it out over 13 years—if we stay with this budget. That is the kind of commitment we ought to make. We talked about tax reduction. Think about what it is. This budget would provide about \$150 billion in 5 years in tax relief to American families—over \$13 billion next year alone in the form of marriage penalty relief which, again, is a fairness tax. In the form of educational assistance now, is reducing taxes a bad thing if we are going to—increase the health care deductibility? I don't believe so. We are seeking to provide more coverage for people—without making a total government program out of it—by giving some kind of tax relief to do that.

I think this is going to be a very important debate and an important discussion. I understand there will be differences of view. That is what this body is all about, talking about different philosophies. There will be different philosophies, such as saying the more spending we have, the better government is and the better off everyone is. That is a point of view. I don't happen to share it. I think there ought to

be limitations on the size and role of government. We ought to be building opportunity instead of doing those sorts of things.

I think we have a great opportunity to do some of the things we have talked about for years; that is, to reduce the debt, to secure Social Security, and to provide some incentives for people to do things for themselves.

We have the opportunity, and we will be doing it this week. I think we ought to take into account not only the dollars that are there, and not only the specific expenditures, but how we envision the role of government over time. How does that fit into the idea of freedom and opportunity for all? What is the role of a government in that?

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

MR. WYDEN. Thank you, Mr. President.

PREScription DRUG AFFORDABILITY

MR. WYDEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about a very encouraging development and solution with respect to prescription drugs.

I have come to the floor on more than 20 separate occasions over the last several months to talk particularly about how America can no longer afford to deny this critical coverage. Again and again, I cited examples on the floor of this Senate about how our country cannot afford to deny seniors the opportunity to get prescription drug coverage. I have talked, for example, about the exciting anticoagulant drugs. These drugs allow a senior citizen, for example, for perhaps \$1,000 or \$1,500, to prevent a stroke which might end up costing more than \$100,000.

What is so exciting about these prescription medicines is that they don't just help older people when they are very ill, but they are absolutely key to keeping older people healthy by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol. They will help senior citizens stay in the community and will keep them from racking up those much larger health care expenses under what is known as Part A of the Medicare Hospital Insurance Trust Fund.

Again and again, we have seen examples of how cholesterol-lowering drugs can reduce death and expenses for senior citizens.

For example, heart disease is the leading cause of death for persons 65 and older. Beta blockers can reduce long-term mortality by 25 percent, and they cost about \$360 a year, or \$30 a month.

One in five older women has osteoporosis. About 15 percent have suffered fractures as a result this disease. This disease is the leading risk factor for hip fractures. Estrogen replacement can reduce the risk of osteoporosis as well as cardiovascular disease. One commonly used drug costs

\$20 a month. This is an investment that can help avoid those hip fractures and help avoid the extraordinary medical expenses.

I must say that my own mother, who will be 80 years of age very shortly, had a hip fracture recently, and this drove home to me how these prescription medicines can help avoid the kinds of health problems that my mother and scores of others seniors have seen, and how providing coverage now is an investment this Senate cannot afford to pass up.

What was exciting about the developments in the budget resolution was, first, that the Budget Committee committed \$40 billion would be committed for this important program. For example, on the other side of the Capitol, the House of Representatives talked about \$40 billion, but they could spend it on just about anything in the health care arena. The Senate Budget Committee said we are going to make \$40 billion available for prescription drugs because it is high time we set in place this important coverage.

Second, we provided a date certain to get this job done. Our colleague from Louisiana, Senator BREAUX, has been correct to say repeatedly that the Senate Finance Committee has now held 14 hearings on this issue. Clearly there is great interest in that committee in moving forward.

The budget resolution says on this point that if the Senate Finance Committee does not come forward with a prescription drug benefit on or before September 1st of this year, any Member of the Senate can come to the floor of this body and bring this issue before the Senate.

The Presiding Officer of the Senate, who serves with me on the Senate Committee on Aging, could come to the floor if he had a plan to deal with prescription drugs. Senator SNOWE and I have teamed up on a bipartisan basis. We are particularly grateful for the help of Senator GORDON SMITH last week in the Budget Committee. The resolution allows any group of Senators to come forward with legislation if the Senate Finance Committee does not report a prescription drug measure on or before September 1st of this year.

I think it is critical to note that many Senators in the leadership of both political parties were involved in this effort.

Senator DASCHLE has talked to me almost daily about the importance of the Senate dealing with this issue, and dealing with it this year. He has worked very hard to try to reconcile the various approaches Senators have on this issue. He also has been steadfast in saying how important it is that the Senate not put this off until after another election.

There may be some colleagues on the Republican side and some on the Democratic side who will say: Let's just talk about this in the political campaign.

I believe we can't afford to deny this coverage to the Nation's senior citizens.

Senator DASCHLE has been resolute in saying we ought to go forward and deal with this issue, and deal with it in this session of Congress.

I also want to commend several of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle: Senator DOMENICI, for example, in the Budget Committee, when this issue got to a flash point; it would have been very difficult even to go forward. Senator DOMENICI worked with several of us, particularly Senator SNOWE and Senator SMITH, in order to bring the committee together on this point. We had some bipartisan support last week in the Budget Committee for taking tangible action on this issue.

What is really important is that every Senator understands that I and others are going to stay at this issue again and again and again so the Senate does not miss this historic opportunity.

Too often, whether dating back to catastrophic health care legislation or the failed efforts in 1993 and 1994 to pass comprehensive health care reform, we have muffed. The Congress has muffed the opportunity to put in place a historic breakthrough in terms of health care in our country. I think we have another such opportunity as a result of the work that was done in the Budget Committee last week.

Only about one in four of our senior citizens has prescription drug coverage. Many of them take up to 20 medicines a year. Something like 20 percent of the Nation's senior citizens spend over \$1,000 out of pocket now on their prescription medicines. As a result of these and other factors, there is not a single specialist in the health care field and not a Democrat or a Republican who would create a Medicare program today without including prescription drug coverage.

That is why the breakthrough we saw in the Budget Committee last week is so important. I think it is absolutely critical that we keep what was done in the Budget Committee throughout this process. It may be challenged on the floor of the Senate this week. My understanding is that there will be Senators opposed to it, but I think we can build on the work that was done last week in the Budget Committee. Again, I commend Chairman DOMENICI, Senator SNOWE, and Senator GORDON SMITH, my colleague from Oregon, for working with us on it—we can get this done; we can ensure that action on prescription drugs is tied to reform of the Medicare program.

Many of my colleagues have stressed this. I think they are right. I, too, happen to believe it would be better to have comprehensive Medicare reform that includes prescription drug coverage.

I think it is also clear—and I stress this because it is so important to this Senator and many on this side of the aisle—that we cannot afford to wait. We want to use competitive purchasing principles for prescription drug benefit. We will use the kind of principles that

make sense in private sector health care. We will ensure the benefit is voluntary. No senior would have to choose this particular benefit if they preferred their existing coverage. However, we do want to put in place a universal coverage program. We want to get it done before this Congress adjourns.

We are going to fight with all our strength to protect what was done in the Budget Committee last week on the floor of the Senate this week and when it goes to conference and throughout the process so that if the Senate Finance Committee does not act to provide this benefit on or before September 1 of this year, that any Member of this body will be able, without facing points of order, come to the floor of the Senate and force the Senate to deal with this critical issue.

I am sure when my colleagues go home and talk to constituents they will find what I have found; that is, the question of prescription drug coverage is one of the two or three most pressing issues our constituents care about.

We have families and older people all across this country who are walking on an economic tightrope balancing their food bills against their fuel bills and their fuel bills against their medical costs.

I have been bringing to the floor of the Senate cases of older people who are supposed to take three pills and they take only two. They are breaking their lipid-lowering capsules in half—the drugs that help to deal with cholesterol and heart problems—because they cannot afford to take the full pill.

I spoke recently about a case from Hillsboro, OR, my home State. A physician actually put an elder person in a hospital for 6 weeks because that elderly man could not afford the medicine on an outpatient basis. Allowing outpatient coverage of medicine is what we are trying to accomplish in the Senate. Seniors could get their medicine without going into the hospital. That older gentleman in Hillsboro, OR, had to be hospitalized for 6 weeks so he could get his medicine paid for under what is known as Part A of the Medicare program. That is a classic example of how, under today's health care system, dollars are wasted by having a person hospitalized rather than getting help in the community and, at the same time, facing the predicament of taking longer to get healthy than if these benefits have been available more promptly on an outpatient basis for the elderly.

Last week's developments in the Budget Committee were encouraging. Many predicted the Budget Committee would not adopt binding language with respect to prescription drugs that would allow the Senate to get this program enacted, and get it enacted this year. However, the Budget Committee came together. I commend my colleagues, Senator SNOWE and Senator GORDON SMITH. They have worked with me for 15 months. We now have funding available in the budget resolution. We

have a date certain when it can actually come before the Senate. If the Finance Committee doesn't act on or before September 1, any Senator could bring this issue to the floor of the Senate and it would be tied to the question of Medicare reform.

There is a long way to go. We have to get through the discussion this week. Then we will have a conference committee. Then many Members will work closely with the Finance Committee where there are many interested Senators who have devoted time to this prescription drug issue.

What was done in the Budget Committee last week was something of a breakthrough. It was a very encouraging development for the millions of seniors and families who are watching how Congress deals with this issue, watching to make sure we do it this year, do it on a bipartisan basis, and not just send it out to be another topic and cannon fodder for the political campaign this fall.

As I have made clear, I intend to keep coming back to the floor again and again raising examples of why this Nation cannot afford to deny prescription drug coverage for the elderly. More than 4,000 seniors from Oregon have written me since I have begun this effort. The cases illustrate in a dramatic way how important it is that Congress deal with this issue now.

I intend, with my colleagues, to come back again and again and again until we get this coverage for the Nation's older people. This country can no longer afford to have the Congress deny this coverage. With the work done in the Budget Committee, we have an opportunity now to deal with this issue promptly. The seniors who come to our town hall meetings with their prescription drug bills tell how their private insurance doesn't cover their prescriptions. Because they cannot afford prescription medicine, very often they get sicker. They are the ones who have a right to expect this Congress to act.

The developments last week for the first time give me a tangible sense that we are going to be able to get this done. It was concrete evidence that the Congress understands how important this issue is. Many of my colleagues have said this is one of their top two priorities for this session of Congress. Certainly it is for this Senator. We are going to keep coming back to this floor, stressing the need for action on their prescriptions until the Senate moves to do what should have been done years ago.

When Medicare was enacted in 1965, it did not cover prescription drugs. Now the big buyers, the health maintenance organizations and the health plans, are able to negotiate discounts. That means senior citizens in Alabama, Oregon, and across the country pay more for their medicine because they are not able to get the benefits of the big buyers. Seniors are going to have the power of the big buyers if we can act this session. A number of the key

bills before the Senate give older people bargaining power in the marketplace in order to be able to afford their medicine. That is key—affordability—the ability of senior citizens to afford their prescription medicine so they don't have to give up food, rent, and heat.

Making drugs affordable for seniors has been important to all Members who have focused on this issue. Yet there are many seniors who struggle to make ends meet because they cannot get medicine in an affordable way. The budget resolution provides the opportunity now for those seniors to get relief. I will do everything in my power, and there are many of my colleagues who will, as well, to defend what was done in the Budget Committee last week on prescription drugs throughout this process. If we have a floor fight on this measure, those who try to knock out what the Budget Committee did ought to understand how strong Members feel who worked to get that prescription drug coverage in the budget resolution. I hope we will not see that kind of fight.

I hope the work done by Senator SNOWE and Senator SMITH, along with Senator DASCHLE, Senator CONRAD, and myself, the group of Members who worked with the Budget Committee, can be preserved.

It ought to be preserved for the Nation's senior citizens. Those are the people who are counting on us to deliver on this critical issue. I intend to keep coming back to this floor again and again and again until we have achieved this major health care reform that the older people of this country richly deserve.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and 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. CRAIG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SESSIONS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

Mr. CRAIG. I inquire of the Chair, what is the business on the floor at this moment?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I will then proceed for the next few moments in morning business.

I believe that when I am done, I will also conclude the Senate for the day and take us out, as others who had been planning morning business comments for the day are not going to be with us.

ENERGY PRICES AND GAS TAXES

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I thought I would come to the floor today to speak again about energy and the cur-

rent energy cost crisis in which this Nation finds itself.

Many of us have been to the floor numerous times over the last several weeks comparing our current situation and the tremendous runup in gas prices with this administration's lack of an energy policy and how they correlate—or if they relate.

I have said, most critically, over the last several weeks, the only policy in town is the "tin cup" policy: Give our Secretary of Energy a tin cup, and send him to foreign oil-producing nations to beg for a little crude.

He has been begging. He wanted a lot more. He begged for 2 million barrels a day in additional production. He got considerably less than that. I think it is now a wait-and-see: How does this level out? What do the markets say? What is the consumer going to pay at the gas pump in July? My guess is, the consumer is going to be paying near \$2 a gallon for regular gasoline, depending on where they are in the country.

The reason for this situation is what I would like to talk about this afternoon. Congress can respond in some ways. But we cannot increase oil production in the short term because, largely, we have had a policy of reducing oil production in this country for the last two decades, and it takes time to bring that production back on line. A great many people out there are opposed to increasing domestic production—all in the name of the environment or all in opposition to using hydrocarbons or some other issue that has helped shape the Clinton/Gore energy policy over the last 8 years.

When the Clinton-Gore administration came to town in 1993, its announced intention was to drastically alter the way the Nation used energy, especially fossil fuels. The President and the Vice President determined that a broad-based Btu tax would force us away from coal and oil and natural gas to renewable energies, such as solar and wind and biomass. That objective has remained the hallmark of this administration's energy policy—until now; that is, until the day before yesterday, when the President was blaming the Congress, saying we had failed to reauthorize the Strategic Petroleum Reserve—the salt domes in the Gulf of Mexico, where we have stored about 570 million barrels of crude oil.

The President promised his Btu tax would raise nearly \$72 billion over 5 years, from 1994 to 1998, and marketed it as fair, helpful to the environment, that it would force down our dependence on foreign oil, and that it would have trivial impacts on consumers.

Congress did not pass the Btu tax because we thought it would be damaging to the consumer. And over the years we have become increasingly more dependent upon foreign oil. I doubt the President can declare a victory because he was unable to suck \$72 billion out of the back pockets of Americans while at the same time he advanced policies that slowed down crude oil production in our country.

In fact, the Btu tax would have unfairly punished energy-intensive States and industries. Estimates by the American Petroleum Institute and the National Association of Manufacturers predicted the tax would hurt exports, reduce GDP by \$38 billion, and destroy 700,000 American jobs.

That is why the Congress finally refused to pass the tax, over the President's and the Vice President's objection. Vice President GORE and President Clinton claimed the tax was needed to balance the budget and fund large new spending programs to offset the negative impact of the tax. They also claimed that use of crude oil imports would be reduced by 400,000 barrels a day.

At that time, DOE's own projections predicted—this is the President's own Department of Energy—that the tax would shave oil import growth by less than one-tenth in 10 years. DOE also predicted that by the year 2000, Americans would depend on foreign oil for three-fifths of their total crude oil requirements.

So quite the opposite was going on inside the administration. The President was talking politics, and his own Department of Energy was analyzing the matter and coming up with some very interesting facts.

The American Petroleum Institute, in testimony, said:

... even if imports were to fall by the full 400,000 barrels a day claimed by the Administration, the cost of \$34 billion in lost GDP is excessive relative to other alternatives for improving energy security. Using the Administration's optimistic predictions, the cost of the Btu tax works out to about \$230 per barrel.

Of course, that would have been devastating to an economy that is highly dependent upon fossil fuels that not only make our cars and trucks go, but feed the whole petrochemical industry which manufactures carpeting, herbicides, pesticides, insecticides, and plastics, all of those things that make up our very large, integrated economy—therefore, the 700,000 estimated jobs lost if we were to raise the price of crude oil to \$230 a barrel.

In the end, Congress did the right thing; we refused the President's and the Vice President's policy and said it would simply create havoc in our economy. Congress did agree to raise taxes on transportation fuels by 4.3 cents—the first time the Congress has actually put a tax on fuel—and then put it into the general fund of the Treasury. Of course, it was argued to be a deficit reduction tax.

A couple of years ago, we finally pulled that tax out of the general fund and put it back in the surface transportation fund, where all highway fuels taxes have gone historically, to fund the construction of roads, highways, and bridges.

The Clinton-Gore administration's obsession with fossil fuel use reduction has actually put us in the position we find ourselves today. The President, on March 7, 2000, at the White House said: