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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 2, 2000, at 12:30 p.m.

Senate

MONDAY, MAY 1, 2000

The Senate met at 10:01 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Gracious Lord, our hearts are filled with an attitude of gratitude for the gifts of life: intellect, emotion, will, strength, fortitude, and courage. We are privileged to live in this free land You have so richly blessed.

You have created each of us to know, and love, and serve You. Thanksgiving is the memory of our hearts. You have shown us that gratitude is the parent of all other virtues. Without gratitude, our lives miss the greatness You intended, and we remain proud, self-centered, and limited. Thanksgiving is the thermostat of our souls opening us to the inflow of Your Spirit and the realization of even greater blessings.

We also thank You for the problems that make us more dependent on You for guidance and strength. When we have turned to You in the past, You have given us leadership skills that we needed. Thank You, Lord, for taking us where we are with all our human weaknesses, and using us for Your glory. May we always be distinguished by the immensity of our gratitude for the way that You pour out Your wisdom and vision when we humbly call out to You for help. We are profoundly grateful. You are our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CRAIG THOMAS, a Senator from the State of Wyoming, led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, for the information of all Senators, following morning business, the Senate will begin consideration of S. 2, the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act. It is expected that this legislation will consume most of the week. However, by previous consent, on Tuesday morning the Senate will begin debate on overriding the President's veto of the nuclear waste bill. As a reminder, the vote on the veto override has been scheduled for 3:15 p.m. on Tuesday.

I thank my colleagues for their attention.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate begin a period of morning business until 1 p.m. today, with the time equally divided in the usual form, with Senators speaking for up to 5 minutes

each, with the following exception: Senator THOMAS or his designee from 10:30 to 11 a.m.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

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

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

PHARMACY BENEFITS FOR MILITARY RETIREES

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Mr. WARNER, as well as my colleagues on the committee, Senator LEVIN, our ranking member, and especially Senator SNOWE, for their efforts in doing the right thing for our Medicare-eligible military retirees.

Today, there was introduced in the Senate, on behalf of Senator WARNER, legislation that will have an extremely positive impact on our military retirees and their ability to acquire prescription drugs. This is enormously important for our retirees and will be strongly supported in this body. Hopefully, it will be a part of the defense authorization bill that will come to the floor in the next few weeks.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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S3043

This initiative gives all military retirees over 65 the same pharmacy benefit that one-third of them already have under the Base Realignment and Closure pharmacy program, a mail order and a retail pharmacy benefit. It makes sense, and is only fair that all military retirees over 65 have one consistent pharmacy benefit.

This pharmacy benefit is a significant and affordable first step in healing the growing rift with the military retiree community caused by the Government's failure to deliver on the promise of health care for life. The pharmacy benefit is the number one issue and priority of military retirees, since pharmacy needs are the biggest drain on the pensions of military retirees. Expanding the BRAC pharmacy benefit to all Medicare-eligible military retirees is the right thing to do for service members who have dedicated their lives to protect and serve our country.

Approximately 450,000 of the 1.3 million Medicare-eligible military retirees already have access to a retail and mail order pharmacy benefit. This was the result of DOD base closures. When the Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommended the closure of several military bases, part of what was lost was access to pharmaceutical benefits for many retired military personnel who were receiving their prescription drug benefits at those facilities. To address their needs, Congress created the BRAC pharmacy benefit which was a mail order, as well as a retail benefit, for needed prescriptions.

Unfortunately, that benefit only covered about a third of all of those who have retired, so we had a dual system where, by accident of where you had retired and by the results of the Base Closure Commission, some retirees received the benefit and others did not. This legislation would treat military retirees across the country the same.

Basically this bill makes prescription drugs accessible and available to military retirees over the age of 65, at a very reasonable cost—a 20 percent co-pay when they acquire the prescription drugs in retail pharmacy and an \$8 co-pay if they buy them through mail order. There is no deductible and no enrollment fee. This is recognition that there are incredibly important and significant health needs for our retirees. This pharmacy benefit is one that our military retirees richly deserve.

The BRAC pharmacy benefit was initiated by the Congress in the Fiscal Year 1994 Defense Authorization Act to ensure that Medicare-eligible retirees, who depended on the base's medical treatment facilities for their pharmacy needs, would be taken care of after the base was closed. This benefit includes the mail order pharmacy program for the co-payment of \$8 for up to a 90-day supply and use of the Tricare retail network pharmacies for a 20-percent co-pay for up to a 30-day supply.

We ask our armed forces to leave their families, risk their lives, fight our wars, help countries ravaged by

disasters, and enforce peace all over the world. Americans who devote their lives to serving our country deserve this benefit. It is wrong for pharmacy benefits to be taken away for the sole reason that a retiree has reached the age of 65.

That is what happens at the present time. Once they turn 65, they go under the Medicare system. Under the Medicare system, there are no prescription drug benefits, which they had otherwise been receiving, so they are left out in the cold. This initiative lets all military retirees know that we have not forgotten them. It lets all of the service members know that if they dedicate their lives to the service of our country, we will take care of their health care needs from the pharmaceutical point of view.

Again, I express great appreciation to Senator WARNER and the others—Senator THURMOND and a number of our colleagues on the committee—particularly Senator SNOWE, who has taken great interest in this prescription drug issue. I think all of us know that the issue of prescription drugs is something of enormous concern to the elderly in this country. It was a benefit that was basically excluded from the coverage of Medicare when Medicare was passed in 1965.

In 1965, the private companies were trying to make Medicare effectively the same kind of benefit package that existed in the private sector. At that time, very few in the private sector had a prescription drug benefit. Today, we see that progress has been made in the private sector. Now, more than 95 percent of the private sector plans provide prescription drug coverage, but Medicare doesn't. That is part of the great debate that, hopefully, we will have in this body before we adjourn; that is, are we going to provide prescription drug benefits for our senior citizens?

What the Armed Services Committee, under the leadership of Senator WARNER, has said is that eligible retirees are going to have those health care needs met, and they do it in a way that makes prescription drugs accessible to them through a mail order and a direct retail system through Tricare. This is basically a nationwide system with only a 20-percent co-payment, no enrollment fee, and no deductible, which will make these prescription drugs accessible and affordable for people who are living in retirement in the armed services community.

I think this is enormously important. I think it is a great step forward. It is in response to the health care needs of men and women who have served this country, and I think it bodes very well for Congress as we try to work together to try to find ways of meeting the needs of others who are retired and need these prescription drugs desperately.

Mr. President, again, I thank Senator WARNER and others for their leadership and for this extremely important and significant step. It bodes well for this

institution, and it is an expression of great appreciation to the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces of our country. I hope that we can follow this precedent and come to grips with the challenges that exist for the elderly in our Nation, and that we are able to develop a prescription drug benefit for them, too, the way we have been able to do it for military retirees. I think that would be great work by this Congress, and there is very little reason that we cannot do it. We should do it. I look forward to working with my colleagues to make sure that it is done.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

IN HONOR OF STEPHEN S.F. CHEN

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to honor Stephen S.F. Chen, who serves as the head of the Taipei Cultural and Economic Representative Office in Washington, DC.

Ambassador Chen will be retiring from diplomatic service and returning to his home in Taiwan soon. I have come to know Ambassador Chen well since his appointment in October of 1997, as have many of my colleagues, and hold him in high regard for his unquestioned professionalism and personal integrity.

Ambassador Chen has, for forty years, ably represented his government in posts throughout the world. His experience in the United States is extensive. During the past twenty-five years Ambassador Chen has served in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. Over the years, Ambassador Chen has become a friend to numerous Americans, myself included. It is fitting in many ways that he closes his diplomatic career here in Washington, among friends.

Mr. President, representing the people of Taiwan abroad is a challenge of great magnitude. The people of Taiwan live in an admirably democratic, free and dynamic community at home. They are significantly more constrained in the international community. Effectively communicating the interests of Taiwan abroad requires considerable diplomatic skill, patience and resolve. Stephen Chen embodies all these traits.

The people of Taiwan could not have had a better Ambassador in Washington, D.C., than Stephen Chen. I will certainly miss my good friend when he leaves and know my colleagues will join me in extending to him our best wishes and great appreciation.

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