

National Sheriffs Association;
National Association of School Resource Officers;
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives;
Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association.

Our law enforcement officers deserve Congress' help, not the abject inaction that has ensued over that last two years.

I recount a few of the aspects of the Hatch-Leahy juvenile crime bill to indicate that it was comprehensive and that it was the result of years of work and weeks of Senate debate and amendment. I said at the outset of the debate last May 1999 that I would like nothing better than to pass responsible and effective juvenile justice legislation. I wanted to pass juvenile justice legislation that would be helpful to the youngest citizens in this country—not harm them. I wanted to pass juvenile justice legislation that assists States and local governments in handling juvenile offenders—not impose a "one-size-fits-all" Washington solution on them. I wanted to prevent juveniles from committing crimes, and not just narrowly focus on punishing children. I wanted to keep children who may harm others away from guns. This bill would have made important contributions in each of these areas.

At the time the bill was considered by the Senate, in May 1999, the Republican Manager of the bill, declared his support for the Senate bill and said:

Littleton was different. The need to do something about the serious problem of youth violence has always been apparent. The tragedy of a month ago gave us the ingenuity and dedication to follow through. . . . I believe that the Senate has crafted a consensus product and one which I intend to support.

He called the Senate bill "a testament to those who worked on it and a product which, on the whole, will help our young people and do something significant about the problems of juvenile crime." He observed:

People believe we are powerless to deal with violent juvenile crime and that we are powerless to change our culture. It is this feeling of powerlessness which threatened our collective ambition for meaningful, penetrating solutions in the wake of the Littleton tragedy. I believe the Senate has taken a meaningful step towards shedding this defeatism.

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Given the seriousness of our youth violence problem—and the number of warning signs that tragedies will continue unless all of us come together—we must move forward. We should join together and pass this bill.

I deeply regret that the Republican leadership of this Congress will not complete our work by holding the conference, meeting, voting, and reporting a final bill to the House and Senate and sending to the President a bill that would improve juvenile justice and school safety.

I commend the Administration for the numerous efforts it has made within the limitations of current law. Most

recently, the Department of Justice has made available a Threat Assessment Perspective on school violence developed by the Critical Incident Response Group and National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime of the FBI. This follows upon the joint Justice and Education Department publication "Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools," which was made available nationwide in 1998. In addition, the Department of Justice has provided important resources through the COPS in Schools Grant Program.

In closing, I thank our schools, teachers, parents, and children for all they have done in the past 2 years, without the Congress' help, to lower the level of violence in our schools. But I regret that this Congress has failed to do its work to provide the additional resources and reforms that would have been helpful and reassuring to our children, parents, grandparents, and teachers at schools. It can be better. It is unconscionable if we do not do better.

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

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

THE RURAL SATELLITE TELEVISION BILL

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I understand that my friend from Mississippi, the distinguished majority leader, may propose a unanimous consent request regarding the rural television loan guarantee bill which I have been working to get passed for many months. If the consent request actually offered is the one I have seen, I will have to object when that happens. I will explain why now so I don't hold up the distinguished leader when he comes to the floor.

As a conferee last year on a major satellite television bill—the Satellite Home Viewer Improvement Act—I worked hard to include, along with other Senators, a provision that would have assured that rural Americans were not left out of the benefits of that Act. I teamed up with other Senators to include a title that would have allowed USDA to provide loan guarantees to companies that wished to offer local-into-local television to rural Americans. We wanted to do this so that rural families would be able to receive their local network television stations over satellite, or other service, along with the full range of other programming. We wanted rural families to be able to get local news, local weather warnings and local programming but recognized that without a loan guarantee program that might never happen.

In other words, we wanted to share the benefits of that bill that would go to urban areas to rural Americans also through a loan guarantee program. I know many parts of rural America would not have the benefits of it without a loan guarantee program. It is similar to what we did in my grandparents' time to bring telephone service and electricity to rural areas.

As a Conferee, I originated the rural satellite guarantee program to be administered by USDA when I was a conferee on the satellite TV bill. Unfortunately, one of the Senate committee chairmen objected to that provision and insisted that it be pulled from the Conference Report. To date, we have been unable to resolve this matter and regain the ground we lost last year. I know the distinguished junior Senator from Montana, Senator BURNS, took an early leadership role in this matter. His colleague, the distinguished senior Senator from Montana, Senator BAUCUS, introduced legislation with me last year also on this issue. We did this to show bipartisan support.

I want to work with all Members on this. The reason I would make such an objection, if it were done the way I have been told, is that to do otherwise I would have to abandon rural America, and I don't intend to do that. As a product of rural America, I feel my roots there very deeply. Ironically enough, this could have already been law by today. There is a simple solution. A lot of Republicans and Democrats agree on this. We can send a great rural satellite loan guarantee bill to the House by working together. I think that could be passed by unanimous consent. Or, we could enact a final bill by a Senate amendment to the House-passed bill. We could do that in the time it would take to get the conferees together to meet.

I am concerned that a conference would delay this process until the end of the year and result in denying rural Americans local-into-local television—the same kind of satellite local-into-local television urban residents now enjoy. I use as an example the electronic signature conference. That showed how difficult a conference can be and it shows how long a conference can take. That conference took way more time to finish than we have left to devote to any rural satellite conference. In addition, the Congress has to pass at least ten major appropriations bills or else there could be another government shutdown. In this case, the proposal would leave two key committees off the conference.

Regarding the e-signature conference, when we finally got the right mix of conferees and followed proper procedures, we still had many struggles before we finished a strong e-signature bill that has been applauded by both businesses and consumers. However, this time around we do not have time because the Congress is going out of session soon.

But we clearly have time to enact this rural satellite bill. My staff provided draft language to many of the Republican and Democratic offices months ago in order to help resolve this matter. I urge the majority leader and the Democratic leader to call a meeting so we can resolve this important issue and send a clean bill over to the House without wasting time. I suspect it would be passed very quickly, with very strong support from the rural areas of our country.

Mr. President, I 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. FRIST. 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.

MEDICARE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I want to very briefly continue a discussion that was held earlier on the floor today addressing an issue that means not only a great deal to me but also to about 35 million seniors in this country as well as 5 million individuals with disabilities. That is the issue of Medicare.

Our obligation, I believe, is to modernize Medicare and give those seniors and those individuals with disabilities what they deserve; that is, health care security as we know it is or should be in the year 2000, not the sort of health care security that was appropriate for 1956, back when Medicare began.

The challenge before us today as a body and the challenge before the American people is really pretty clear; that is, how to best implement a real plan for real people, those seniors and those individuals with disabilities—not just a piece of legislation but a real plan that will modernize Medicare in a way that will give them real health care security.

A lot of individuals with disabilities and a lot of seniors out there don't really realize how antiquated and out of date the current Medicare system is. I would like to make several points.

First of all, I believe modernization of Medicare today where it can truly offer health care security is really a moral obligation that we have to our seniors.

Second, under the leadership of Clinton/Gore, we have had really 8 years where a lot of opportunities have been squandered, and they simply have not led, if we look at this field of Medicare modernization.

Third, we have to ask ourselves in terms of how best to modernize. If we have an old jalopy that still is running along and still gets us from point to point, do we just want to put new gas in that car—we know it is going to eventually fail—or do we want to go ahead and modernize that car so that it

will still get us from point to point but it will do so more efficiently and effectively in a way that will give us security and not just get us there but get us there with the very best quality?

First of all, modernization of health care is a moral obligation. Why do I say that?

If we look back to 1965 when Medicare began, Medicare was constructed to give health care security—inpatient care and some outpatient care—in a very effective way. For acute-care models, if you had a heart attack, you were taken care of essentially in the hospital. Prescription drugs were important but not nearly so important as they are today. We simply didn't know very much about preventive medicine in 1965 and 1970. But all of that has changed. Now we know prescription drugs are critically important to health care security. We know issues such as preventive health care can not only save money but, most importantly, improve the quality of life—not just longer lives but a higher quality of life.

The sad thing is that people don't know Medicare today has very little preventive care in it. I talk to seniors all over the State of Tennessee in town meeting after town meeting. I say it has a little preventive care. They say: We didn't know that. When I talk about prescription drugs, it is surprising to many people today; not only seniors but others do not know that Medicare does not include prescription drugs.

I ask an audience of seniors or individuals with disabilities: How much do you think the Federal Government is helping you with your health care in terms of costs? If you are paying several thousand dollars a year for your health care, how much does the Government actually pay? They say 80 percent, initially, or they say 70 percent, or 60 percent. But in truth, on average, for seniors' health care costs, only about 53 cents on the dollar is paid for by the money they have paid in—by the Government and by the taxpayer. They are responsible and end up paying about 47 cents on the dollar in spite of the fact they paid into this Medicare trust fund over their lives.

Thus, I think we have a moral obligation if we are committed to health care security and to modernization of a system that we know will be modern, that will include preventive care and prescription drugs.

That leads me to the second point. If that is the case and the facts—and it is—where has our leadership been? Where has Vice President GORE been? Where has President Clinton been? They squandered an opportunity over the 6 years I have been in this body, and over the last 8 years, to modernize that system; that is, that Medicare is built on a 1965 model, 35 years ago. It is outdated; it is antiquated; it is a car that is still moving and getting the care but not nearly as efficiently or as comprehensively as our seniors deserve.

The squandering of the opportunity is a pretty tough term to use, saying that our leadership, through President Clinton and Vice President GORE, squandered this opportunity. Run down the list. We had a National Bipartisan Medicare Commission that I had the opportunity to serve on with JOHN BREAU, a Democrat, BILL FRIST, Republican. We were pretty evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. We had the private sector and public sector involved. In essence, the administration, under President Clinton and Vice President GORE, walked away from the Commission's recommendations that were built on over 40 open hearings with access to the very best experts in the United States of America. At the last minute, they walked away from the proposals which had bipartisan support. A majority of the Members supported it. An opportunity squandered. The purpose of that Commission was to modernize Medicare, to bring it up to date, to give our seniors the health care they deserve.

As to the Balanced Budget Act of 2 years ago, the Budget Committee in this body, the U.S. Congress, said: Yes, we need to slow Medicare down, make it fiscally responsible, make sure it is around 20 and 30 years from now. The way it was implemented under President Clinton and Vice President GORE, \$37 billion less than we budgeted was spent—\$37 billion less.

What has that resulted in? It has resulted in facilities closing down, over 200 hospitals—some urban hospitals serving the poor, some rural hospitals in Tennessee, and around the country—have closed.

As many as 20 percent of all Medicare-providing nursing homes are either at risk for bankruptcy or already have gone bankrupt because of this excessive cut in spending—not intended by the U.S. Congress—carried out by this administration.

We hear today there are hundreds of thousands of seniors who are losing access today to prescription drug coverage because they were in a plan called Medicare+Choice plans. Why are they leaving? Why are the plans not able to stay in business today? Because this administration, through the bureaucratic administrative load burden that sits on the shoulders of these plans—when placing the burden on the plans, it falls down to the doctors. Basically, they cannot participate any longer. Those are plans that are giving prescription drugs, making them available. Another squandered opportunity by this administration.

On top of all of that, we had this demographic shift because of the baby boom that we talk about. Yet because of a lack of leadership at the Presidential level and the Vice Presidential level, we squandered another opportunity. The demographic shift is the following: Over the next 30 years, the number of seniors will double compared to what it is today. The number of people paying into this trust fund