

Mr. INHOFE. I thank my colleagues for their attention.

H-1B AND LATINO AND
IMMIGRANT FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, on Friday I moved that we proceed to the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act, and my good friend, the majority leader, objected to our proceeding to that bill. I was disappointed, and I am sorry that we are not going to be able to debate this issue, and hope that there will come a time before this Congress ends when we will be able to do so.

Those who are watching for action on this important piece of legislation should understand why we are at this point; that is, why we are not debating the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act, but, rather, why we are now on H-1B only, and why tomorrow there is going to be a motion to invoke cloture on the underlying bill.

I consider myself to be one of the strongest supporters for increasing visas for highly skilled workers. I have spent an enormous amount of time over the past several years working on this legislation in an effort to expedite its consideration. As a matter of fact, this legislation should have been brought forward to the Senate many months ago. It should have been taken up and debated under the normal process of considering legislation. I believe an H-1B bill would have passed quickly and the legislation would have already been signed into law. But it also would have provided other Members opportunities, as is their right, to offer related immigration amendments for what we all agree is the only immigration bill that we would consider this year as a freestanding bill.

Hindsight is 20-20. The majority decided not to consider this measure under the traditional rules that have served the Senate for more than 200 years. I believe, however, as I have indicated, that we will have time to debate the legislation about which I speak.

I think it is unfortunate that we at this stage are going to do the H-1B bill, apparently, alone. I say that because we were so close to an agreement on this underlying legislation. The details were set—the minority agreed each side would have 10 amendments, an hour each. That was compressed to five, then four. We agreed to do that. But we were turned down, and today we find ourselves in this parliamentary situation.

We could pass this legislation, including the amendment about which I speak, in a day—a day and a half at the most. Instead, the majority is insisting on closing off all debate and preventing the consideration of immigration amendments.

I believe that offering and voting on amendments is a right, not a privilege. H-1B was designed so trained professionals could work for a limited time in the United States. It has become

widely popular, especially in an age such as this, when Microsoft, IBM and other high-tech companies decided they needed people to fill jobs that were simply not being filled. Hundreds of start-up high-tech companies, in addition to the big ones such as Microsoft and IBM, began using this tool, H-1B, in an effort to recruit an army of high-tech workers for programming jobs. Mostly these people came from India, China, and Great Britain. We now have almost half a million people in this country who came as a result of H-1B. Individuals have filled a critical shortage of high-tech workers in this country and, in fact, the demand still exists. That is why we need to raise the cap for H-1B immigration.

But I also believe strongly that we cannot serve one of our country's very important interests and needs at the expense of others—in particular, when the stakes are people's families and their labor.

The needs of the United States are not subject to the zero sum theory. We cannot afford to deal or choose or prioritize between people and who we will serve as their legislators. We must try to serve them all. That is our cause, and that is what we promised our constituents.

This applies specifically to the other pieces of legislation that have been part of this discussion—in particular with the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act, the piece of legislation I moved to proceed on last Friday. This piece of act seeks to provide permanent and legally defined groups of immigrants who are already here, already working, and already contributing to the tax base and social fabric of our country with a way to gain U.S. citizenship.

This piece of legislation provides these people with a way to benefit from the opportunities our country affords good citizenship and hard work. While sectors of this economy have benefited from this extended period of economic growth, and with unemployment rates approaching zero in some parts of our country, employers in all sectors, skilled and semi-skilled, are finding themselves with a tremendous shortage of labor. These views are echoed in many quarters.

I would like to refer, for example, to a letter sent to me by the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, which is a group of businesses and trade associations from around the country which was formed specifically to address the shortage of workers in this country. This letter, dated September 8, is addressed to me.

I ask unanimous consent it be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

ESSENTIAL WORKER
IMMIGRATION COALITION,
September 8, 2000.

Hon. HARRY REID,
Minority Whip, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR REID: The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC) is a coalition of businesses, trade associations, and other organizations from across the industry spectrum concerned with the shortage of both semi-skilled and unskilled ("essential worker") labor.

While all sectors of the economy have benefited from the extended period of economic growth, one significant impediment to continued growth is the shortage of essential workers. With unemployment rates in some areas approaching zero and despite continuing vigorous and successful welfare-to-work, school-to-work, and other recruitment efforts, some businesses are now finding themselves with no applicants of any kind for numerous job openings. There simply are not enough workers in the U.S. to meet the demand of our strong economy, and we must recognize that foreign workers are part of the answer.

Furthermore, in this tight labor market, it can be devastating when a business loses employees because they are found to be in the U.S. illegally. Many of these workers have been in this country for years; paying taxes and building lives. EWIC supports measures that will allow them to remain productive members of our society.

We believe there are several steps Congress can take now to help stabilize the current workforce.

Update the registry date. As has been done in the past, the registry date should be moved forward, this time from 1972 to 1986. This would allow undocumented immigrants who have lived and worked in the U.S. for many years to remain here permanently.

Restore Section 245(i). A provision of immigration law, Section 245(i), allowed eligible people living here to pay a \$1,000 fee and adjust their status in this country. Since Section 245(i) was grandfathered in 1998, INS backlogs have skyrocketed, families have been separated, businesses have lost valuable employees, and eligible people must leave the country (often for years) in order to adjust.

Pass the Central American and Haitian Adjustment Act. Refugees from certain Central American and Caribbean countries currently are eligible to become permanent residents. However, current law does not help others in similar circumstances. Congress needs to act to ensure that refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras have the same opportunity to become permanent residents.

We are also enclosing our reform agenda which includes our number one priority: allowing employers facing worker shortages greater access to the global labor market. EWIC's members employ many immigrants and support immigration reforms that unite families and help stabilize the current U.S. workforce. We look forward to working with you to pass all of these important measures.

Sincerely,
ESSENTIAL WORKER
IMMIGRATION COALITION.
MEMBERS

American Health Care Association.
American Hotel & Motel Association.
American Immigration Lawyers Association.
American Meat Institute.
American Road & Transportation Builders Association.
American Nursery & Landscape Association.

Associated Builders and Contractors.
 Associated General Contractors.
 The Brickman Group, Ltd.
 Building Service contractors Associated International.
 Carlson Hotels Worldwide and Radisson.
 Carlson Restaurants Worldwide and TGI Friday's.
 Cracker Barrel Old Country Store.
 Harborside Healthcare Corporation.
 Ingersoll-Rand.
 International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions.
 International Mass Retail Association.
 Manufactured Housing Institute.
 Nath Companies.
 National Association for Home Care.
 National Association of Chain Drug Stores.
 National Association of RV Parks & camp-grounds.
 National Council of Chain Restaurants.
 National Retail Federation.
 National Restaurant Association.
 National Roofing Contractors Association.
 National Tooling & Machining Association.
 National School Transportation Association.
 Outdoor Amusement Business Association.
 Resort Recreation & Tourism Management.
 US Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this letter, among other things, states:

The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition is a coalition of businesses, trade associations, and other organizations from across the industry spectrum concerned with the shortage of both semi-skilled and unskilled . . . labor.

That is why it is called the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition. Among other things, they want to update the registry, they want to restore section 254(I), and also, as part of their plea, they desire we pass the Central American and Haitian Parity Act.

This coalition has many members. To mention a few: American Health Care Association, American Hotel & Motel Association, American Immigration Lawyers Association, American Road & Transportation Builders Association, Ingersoll-Rand, Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, Carlson Restaurants, National Retail Federation, National Restaurant Association, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, among many others.

As you can tell, this piece of legislation has widespread support. This is not a feel-good piece of legislation, that is only attempts to bring more people into the country. It is legislation that is supported by business people in this country who do not have workers to do the work that is essential for them to conduct their business.

Take Nevada as an example. We, of course, depend on tourism as our No. 1 industry. But every State in the Union does. Tourism is ranked in the top three; in many instances, one or two, in every state of the Union. Nevada is an example of why we need this, as it mirrors the country as a whole.

We have to build a new school in Clark County, Las Vegas, every month to keep up with the growth. We have as many as 10,000 people a month moving into Las Vegas. We have jobs in the service industry that simply cannot be

filled. We have one hotel that has 5,005 rooms. It takes people to cook the food for the guests, to make the beds, do all the maintenance work in this massive facility, and we are having trouble finding people to do this work. That is another reason why we support this legislation.

This bill aims to correct flaws in current immigration policy that have separated families and denied individuals an opportunity to apply for legal immigrant status by addressing three main issues. First, it would address the Central American and Haitian Parity Act of 2000, otherwise known as NACARA. This important legislation codifies that Central American and Haitian immigrants be granted the same rights that are currently granted to Nicaraguans and Cubans coming to the United States. There is no reason in the world that other people who come under basically the same basis as Nicaraguans and Cubans should not be given the same privileges. Second, 245(I) reauthorizes legislation which would allow immigrants meeting certain criteria to remain in the United States with their families and loved ones, rather than being forced to leave the country while their status is being adjusted.

Every one of us in the Senate have heard these heartbreaking examples, getting calls from our State offices where people are forced to go back to their country of origin when they already have a job here, and a quirk in the law is the only reason that they are ordered to go home. Section 245(I) would reauthorize legislation which would allow these immigrants meeting these criteria to remain in the United States while their status is being adjusted, rather than having them go home, lose their job here, leave their family here. It serves no purpose for the country they go to, and certainly not the country from which they come, the United States.

The third main component of the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act incorporates legislation I introduced earlier this year in S. 2407 that would change the date of registry from 1972 to 1986.

I would like to provide a little background as to why I thought it was necessary to introduce the Date of Registry Act of 2000. We all remember the massive immigration reform legislation we considered in 1996 during the last days of the 104th Congress. Pasted into that was the Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, an obscure but lethal description which stripped the Federal courts of jurisdiction to adjudicate legalization claims against the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

First of all, let me say no one who supports this legislation supports illegal immigration.

We believe people who come here should play by the rules. But some people are found in predicaments that need to be readjusted and need to be re-examined.

That is why this legislation is so important.

That provision I talked about was sneaked into the 1996 act, section 377. This has caused significant hardship and denied due process and fundamental fairness for, not hundreds, not thousands, but hundreds of thousands of hard-working immigrants, including about 20,000 in the State of Nevada.

With its hands tied by section 377 language, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a series of rulings in which it dismissed the claims of class action members and revoked thousands of work permits and stays from deportation.

As I said, in Nevada alone, about 20,000 people have been affected. These are good, hard-working people who have been in the United States and paid taxes for more than a decade. Suddenly they lose their jobs and ability to support their families.

I can remember Bill Richardson came to the State of Nevada. He was then the ambassador to the United Nations. We have a large Hispanic population in Nevada. Over 25 percent of the kids in our six largest school districts in America have Latino ancestry.

Recently I took part in an event with Secretary of Energy Richardson. We were going to this recreation center. It was kind of late at night. We were told before going there that there were a lot of demonstrators and we should go in the back way, not go in the front way.

Ambassador Richardson and I decided we would go in the front way and walk through these people out there. There were hundreds of people there, none of whom were there to cause any trouble. They were there to tell a story, and the stories they told were very sad. These were people who had American children who were born in the United States and either a husband or wife had improper paperwork done. There were problems. For example, one of the attendees gave a large sum of money to an individual who said he could help them with their citizenship papers. Later he found out that they had not been properly filled out. They were being cheated. There were all kinds of reasons why these people did not meet the program that was necessary to allow them to be here legally. But the main problem they had was section 377 because they could not have a due process hearing. It was outlawed in the 1996 act.

There were terribly sad stories of these people who had lost their homes because of having no work permits. Employers were there saying: Why can't this man or woman work? I need them. I can't find anybody to replace them.

This was one occasion I met with these people. I met with them on several other occasions, and I have seen firsthand the pain this cruel process has caused. Men and women who once knew the dignity of a decent, legal wage have been forced to seek work underground in an effort to make ends meet. Mortgages have been foreclosed

when families who lived in their own homes have been unable to pay their mortgages. They have lost their cars. Parents who had fulfilled dreams of sending their children to college, as they themselves had not been able to do, have seen those dreams turn into nightmares.

What could have happened to create these most unfortunate consequences? As I said, there are lots of reasons. For example, during the 99th Congress, we passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which provided a one-time opportunity for certain aliens already in the United States who met specific criteria to legalize that status.

The statute established a 1-year period from May of 1987 to May of 1988, during which the INS was directed to accept and adjudicate applications from persons who wished to legalize their status. However, in implementing the congressionally mandated legalization program, the INS created new criteria and a number of eligibility rules that were nowhere to be found in the 1986 legislation.

In short, the INS failed to abide by a law passed by a Democratic Congress and signed by a Republican President, President Reagan.

Thousands of people who were, in fact, eligible for legalization were told they were ineligible or were blocked from filing legalization applications. Thousands of applicants sued, but by the time the Supreme Court ruled in 1993 that the INS indeed contravened the 1986 legislation, the 1-year period for applying for legalization had passed. They were in a Catch-22.

While conceding that it had unlawfully narrowed eligibility for legalization, the INS was clearly dissatisfied with the Supreme Court decision. So the court cases dragged on, and the agency employed a different, much more clever approach.

Rather than affording the people within these classes due process of law, the INS succeeded in slipping an obscure amendment into the massive 1996 Illegal Immigrant Reform and Responsibility Act which, in effect, as I said, stripped the Federal courts of their jurisdiction to hear claims based upon the 1986 legislation. That provision was section 377 and is now, unfortunately, the law of the land.

Changing the date of registry to 1986 would ensure that those immigrants who were wrongfully denied the opportunity to legalize their status would finally be afforded that which they deserved 13 years ago.

It is of interest to note that it was also during 1986 that the Congress last changed the date of registry. The date of registry exists as a matter of public policy, with the recognition that immigrants who have remained in the country continuously for an extended period of time—and in some cases as many as 30 years—are highly unlikely to leave, and that is an understatement.

Today we must accept the reality that many of the people living in the

United States are undocumented immigrants who have been here for a long time. Consequently, they do pay some taxes, but they could be paying more. They pay sales tax, and many times they do not pay income taxes. As a result, the businesses that employ these undocumented persons do not pay their fair share of taxes.

These are the facts, and coupled with the knowledge that we cannot simply solve this problem by wishing it away, this is the reality we must face when considering our immigration policies today and tomorrow.

We last changed the date of registry in 1986 with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act which changed the date from January 1, 1972. In doing that, the 99th Congress employed the same rationale I have outlined above in support of a registry date change.

Furthermore, my date of registry legislation included in this bill is critical in another aspect. It establishes an appropriate 15-year differential between the date of enactment and the updated date of registry.

This measure builds upon the 15-year differential standard established in the 1986 reform legislation by implementing a "rolling registry" date which would sunset in 5 years without congressional reauthorization. In other words, on January 1, 2002, the date of registry would automatically change to January 1, 1987, thereby maintaining the 15-year differential. The date of registry would continue to change on a rolling basis through January 1, 2006, when the date of registry would be January 1, 1991. Limiting this automatic change to 5 years would allow the Congress to examine both the positive and negative effects of a rolling date of registry and make an informed decision on reauthorization.

I should note again that the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which last changed the date of registry, was passed by a Democratic Congress and a Republican President. I mention these facts to highlight my hope that support for this legislation will be bipartisan and based upon our desire to ensure fundamental fairness as a matter of public policy in our country.

We hear many of our friends on the other side of the aisle, particularly the Republican candidate for President, talking about how the priorities of the Latino community are his priorities. I can tell everyone within the sound of my voice that I have met with many members of the Latino community, and whether it is members of the Hispanic caucus in the Congress or community activists in Nevada or other parts of the country, I am consistently reminded that the provisions contained in the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act are of their highest priority.

Vice President GORE recognizes this fact and believes he is truly in touch with the concerns and needs of the Latino community by supporting this

legislation. If Governor Bush were really serious about the priorities of the Latino community, he would follow Vice President GORE's lead and demand that Congress take up and pass this act today.

This bill would solve the problems of many who have lived in this country for many years but have been wrongly denied the opportunity to legalize their status. This bill would solve the problem of workers who have been paying taxes, who have feared having their work permits stripped, or worse, being deported and separated from their families.

Consider for a moment U.S. citizens of Latino ancestry—past immigrants—who have made significant contributions to American society and culture in every sphere, as have other immigrants from other parts of the world. I am very proud of the fact my father-in-law immigrated to this country from Russia. We are a nation of immigrants. My grandmother came from England.

Throughout our short history as a nation, immigrants have fueled the engine of our economy, and Latino immigrants are no different. Latino purchasing power has grown 43 percent since 1995, reaching over \$400 billion this year. Because Latinos create jobs, the number of Latino-owned firms grew by over 76 percent between 1987 and 1992, and will employ over 1.5 million people by next year.

Latinos care about the United States and are willing to fight for it too. Americans of Latino ancestry have fought for the United States in every war beginning with the American Revolution. Currently, approximately 80,000 Latino men and women are on active duty, and over 1 million Latinos are veterans of foreign wars.

Finally, Latinos participate in the American democracy. Of registered voters, Latinos have a higher voter turnout than the population as a whole. Latinos, both established and those new to our hometowns, contribute greatly to the United States. What better time to reconsider our Latino immigration policy and make it more practical and more fair than this month as we celebrate Latino Heritage Month.

America has always drawn strength from the extraordinary diversity of its people, and Latino Heritage Month presents an opportunity to commemorate the history, achievements, and contributions of Americans of Latino ancestry, as well as think to the future.

Immigrants' love for this country is predicated by the recognition of firsthand knowledge of how special this country is and how privileged they are and we are to live here. I believe Latinos will continue to make important contributions to America's future, but in order for Latinos to continue helping America, America must help them with this legislation.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a letter from the National Restaurant Association be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION,
Washington, DC, May 11, 2000.

Hon. HARRY REID,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR REID: On behalf of the National Restaurant Association and the 815,000 restaurants nationwide, we want to thank you for introducing S. 2407, the Date of Registry Act of 2000, and urge the prompt passage of this legislation.

The restaurant industry is the nation's largest private sector employer, providing more than 11 million jobs across the nation. Restaurants have long played an integral role in this country's workforce. Not only does the restaurant industry provide a first step into the workforce for thousands of new workers, for many of them it provides a career. In fact, 90 percent of all restaurant managers and owners got their start in entry-level positions within the industry. Throughout the next century, restaurants will continue to be the industry of opportunity. However, there will be many challenges for the restaurant industry in the face of a growing global economy and a tightening labor market. Addressing the labor shortage is of critical concern.

The restaurant industry is the proud employer of many immigrants and has long supported immigration reforms that unite families and help stabilize the current U.S. workforce. While S. 2407 does not address our key concerns about labor shortages, we believe it will help stabilize the current workforce. Nearly 15 years ago, Congress enacted a legalization program that the INS, through action and regulation, wrongly prohibited many qualified immigrants from using. Furthermore, in 1996 Congress stripped federal courts of their ability to hear those immigrants' cases. S. 2407 would address the problems created by these circumstances. The National Restaurant Association strongly supports passage of S. 2407.

We look forward to working with you long-term to address the labor shortage issue and to passing S. 2407 this year. Thank you for your efforts to reform immigration laws.

Sincerely,

STEVEN C. ANDERSON,
President and Chief
Executive Officer.

LEE CULPEPPER,
Senior Vice President,
Government Affairs
and Public Policy.

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

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

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes as in morning business.

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

VICTIMS OF GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, it has been more than a year since the Columbine tragedy, but still this Republican Congress refuses to act on sensible gun legislation.

Since Columbine, thousands of Americans have been killed by gunfire. Until

we act, Democrats in the Senate will read the names of some of those who have lost their lives to gun violence in the past year, and we will continue to do so every day that the Senate is in session.

In the name of those who died, we will continue this fight. Following are the names of some of the people who were killed by gunfire one year ago today.

September 25, 1999: Salvatore Bonaventure, 34, Detroit, MI; Darnell Butler, 26, Baltimore, MD; Rodney Campbell, 35, Tulsa, OK; Lewis Crouch, 68, Gary, IN; Roy Dunbar, 31, Chicago, IL; Zachery Gordon, Jr., 25, Baltimore, MD; Gordon Green, 42, Philadelphia, PA; Dominic Hunt, 21, Baltimore, MD; Richard Love, 15, St. Louis, MO; Gerardo R. Martinez, 29, Chicago, IL; Jesus Revron, 32, Philadelphia, PA; Duane Russell, 26, Minneapolis, MN; Fabian Venancio, 41, Tulsa, OK; Unidentified Female, 15, Chicago, IL; Unidentified Male, 46, Long Beach, CA; Unidentified Male, 48, Long Beach, CA; Unidentified Male, 31, San Jose, CA.

One of the victims of gun violence I mentioned, 31-year-old Roy Dunbar of Chicago, was an art teacher who worked at his local boys and girls club. Every day at that club, more than 300 kids participated in athletics and other after-school activities. Known as the "professor" at the club, Roy tried to steer youngsters away from gangs, violence and drugs. One year ago today, Roy was driving home when a gang member he knew from the neighborhood flagged him down. Roy expressed concern for the boy and encouraged him to stop associating with gangs. Evidently, the boy was insulted by Roy's words because the boy pulled a gun and shot at Roy until the gun was out of ammunition.

Another victim, 15-year-old Richard Love of St. Louis, died after he was shot in the abdomen by two of his friends while they were playing with his .22 caliber pistol.

Following are the names of some of the people who were killed by gunfire one year ago Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

September 22, 1999: Telly Butts, 22, Gary, IN; Ray Clay, 40, Detroit, MI; Emmitt Crawford, 54, Oklahoma City, OK; Berneal Fuller, 27, Gary, IN; Ricardo Griffin, 22, Detroit, MI; Benjamin Hall, 45, New Orleans, LA; Desean Knox, 14, Gary, IN; Randy Laturini, 29, Minneapolis, MN; William McClary, 29, Detroit, MI; Yonatan Osorio, 17, Dallas, TX; Victor Richardson, 28, Denver, CO; Marice Simpson, 26, New Orleans, LA.

September 23, 1999: Domingo Alvarez, 63, Miami, FL; William Belle, 70, Miami, FL; James Bonds, 43, Baltimore, MD; Peter A. Cary, 50, Seattle, WA; Jean Paul Henderson, 20, New Orleans, LA; Alfred Hunter, 26, Detroit, MI; Kenneth Ponder, Sr., 27, Louisville, KY; Jason L. Ward, 28, Oklahoma City, OK; Eric D. Williams, 24, Chicago, IL.

September 24, 1999: Dudley R. Becker, 52, Seattle, WA; Sher Bolter, 57, Louis-

ville, KY; Barry Bell, 27, Oakland, CA; Alexander Brown, 33, Philadelphia, PA; Arletha Brown, 32, Toledo, OH; Ryan V. Coleman, 29, Chicago, IL; Teddy Garvin, 17, Washington, DC; James Hojnacki, 34, Toledo, OH; Michael Irish, 55, Denver, CO; Dianne Jefferson-Nicolas, 53, Chicago, IL; Odel Norris, 20, Philadelphia, PA; Eric Leron Martin, San Francisco, CA; Paul Rexrode, 34, Baltimore, MD; Aaron Walker, 18, Washington, DC; Unidentified Male, 14, Chicago, IL.

We cannot sit back and allow this senseless gun violence to continue. The deaths of these people are a reminder to all of us that we need to enact sensible gun legislation now.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, for the past 2 weeks, my colleagues have heard me speak regarding the need to add a prescription medication benefit to Medicare. I indicated that in my judgment the most fundamental reform for Medicare is to shift it from a program which, since its inception, has focused on illness and accident—that is, providing services after one becomes sick enough, generally, to go into the hospital or has suffered an accident that requires treatment and hospitalization—and move to a system that also emphasizes prevention; that is, to maintain the highest state of good health and not wait until the state of good health has been destroyed.

If we are to adopt that fundamental shift, it will necessitate that Medicare provide a prescription drug benefit. Why? Because virtually every regimen that is prescribed to stabilize a condition or reverse a condition involves prescription drugs. So a fundamental component of reforming Medicare is to provide prescription drugs.

I have also spoken about the skyrocketing drug prices which are now affecting virtually all of our older citizens.

Today, in my fifth and final statement in this series, I want our colleagues to hear from real people, the people who are affected by the decisions we are about to make. These stories remind us that we have little time to waste.

Unfortunately, some of the voices I am going to present are probably going to be too far gone in their need for prescription drugs and in their personal circumstances to benefit by a program which, under the most optimistic timetable, would not commence until October 1, 2002 and, under other proposals, would be even 2 years beyond that in terms of being available through the Medicare program as a universal benefit.

While we are arguing as to whether to put a prescription medication benefit into effect and start the clock running towards the time when it will actually be available, people are breaking bones. They are going blind. While we are debating which party would benefit