

BUS SAFETY

Mr. CLELAND. Madam President, I rise today to address two timely issues.

It is with a heavy heart over the loss of two passengers on a Greyhound bus last night in California and the injury of several others that I turn the attention of the Senate to bus security. This tragedy occurred when a passenger attacked the driver of the bus. After a heroic struggle upon being stabbed in the neck, the driver lost control of the bus. That is when the bus careened off Interstate 5. The alleged attacker was subsequently arrested by the police.

While terrorism is not suspected as the cause of the attack, no one knows what would have happened had the attacker gained control of the bus. Also, this attack occurs almost exactly 1 year after the October 3, 2001, Greyhound attack in Tennessee that left 7 dead.

However, we have seen the all-too-often result of buses used to commit terror attacks in the Middle East where suicide bombers have used buses to carry out their deadly work. Historically, between 1920 and 2000, about half of the terrorist acts in the world occurred against buses or bus companies. With intercity buses serving almost 800 million passengers annually in over 4,000 communities, I believe Congress must act to protect our travelers from being subject to the same terror and safety concerns.

Last November, I introduced S. 1739 to authorize a 2-year grant program to improve the safety and security of buses. Funding could be used for safety improvements inside the terminals and on buses—for equipment such as metal detectors, database programs for sharing passenger lists, communication technology, cameras, and more. My legislation passed the Commerce Committee earlier this year without opposition, but unfortunately, it has been stalled waiting for floor action. I urge my colleagues to clear this bill for passage by the full Senate today. We owe it to the families of those who have been touched by this tragedy, and we owe it to the millions of passengers embarking on a trip or tour via bus service.

Also, the House companion legislation, H.R. 3429, has passed the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and is pending on the House floor. It has strong bipartisan support, including its sponsor Committee Chairmen DON YOUNG.

Congress has already expressed its approval for funding of such security measures in the 2002 supplemental appropriations bill by providing \$15 million for bus security. My legislation authorizes the program at more adequate levels and provides much-needed congressional commitment for implementation of the program. Intercity bus passengers—our fellow citizens—should feel secure and safe, and Congress should not stand in the way.

Additionally, I would like to ask my colleagues to examine the issue of ac-

cess to technology, which is also important to protecting the security of our people. Over 7 months ago the Commerce committee held a hearing on the so-called digital divide at our colleges and universities that serve the largest concentrations of the Nation's minority students. We heard compelling testimony that a significant technology gap exists for a majority of these students at a time when the world economy is becoming increasingly technology driven. Only one tribal college has funding for a broadband connection, and it is not yet in place. At private historically black colleges and universities, 75 percent of their servers and printers are obsolete or nearly obsolete and in need of replacement. Half of the HBCUs surveyed in a landmark study 2 years ago by the Department of Commerce did not have computers available in the location most accessible to students—their dormitories. Hispanic students are almost 20 percent less likely than non-Hispanic whites to have a home computer and almost 25 percent less likely to use the Internet at home.

Currently there is no Federal program that provides funds to minority-serving colleges and universities for computer hardware and software acquisition. S. 414, the NTIA Digital Technology Program Act, would provide this critically needed resource for America's under-represented and educationally disadvantaged minorities in higher education. It has been lauded as the most significant tool for addressing the infrastructure and instrumentation needs of the Nation's minority-serving institutions since the reauthorization of title III of the Higher Education Act. It is a bipartisan bill sponsored by 18 Senators from both sides of the aisle. The bill was reported unanimously by the Senate Commerce Committee in May and also enjoys bipartisan cosponsorship and support in the House of Representatives.

In the ever-expanding world of the information highway, it should be our mandate to work to ensure that no one in this country is left behind—least of all our leaders of tomorrow.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
S. 414

Mr. CLELAND. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of calendar No. 487, S. 414; that the committee-reported amendments be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read three times and passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table without further intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. BOND. Madam President, I object on behalf of Members on this side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
S. 1739

Mr. CLELAND. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of calendar No. 544, S. 1739; that the Cleland amendment at the desk be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read three times and passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table without further intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. BOND. Madam President, I object on behalf of Members on this side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CLELAND. Madam President, I yield the floor.

Mr. BOND. Madam President, 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. BOND. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

HIGH COST OF HEALTH
INSURANCE

Mr. BOND. Madam President, there is another matter that is extremely important for small businesses in this country; that is, the high cost of health insurance.

I have, along with my colleague, Senator HUTCHINSON from Arkansas, introduced a measure to authorize association of health plans so small businesses can come together in trade associations or other multistate bodies with similar interests to purchase their health insurance with a large pool.

If you purchase as an individual or as a very small business, it is like going into the store and buying soda one can at a time. You can't get a very good price. It also costs you a lot more in administrative costs to administer that plan if you are the sole administrator. From the health insurance standpoint, you don't share the risks over a broad group of people so that you can make an actuarially sound determination of how much health insurance costs.

We have seen health insurance costs rising all across the Nation.

Early last month, I hosted my second National Conference for Women and Small Business Owners in St. Louis. And not surprisingly, some 72 percent of them said providing health insurance, which is extremely costly, was one of the most important challenges they face.

We also found another statistic that I found very amazing. We have 39 or 40 million people without health insurance in the country today. That is far too many. But did you know that 60 percent—roughly 24 million of those

people—are either employees, employers, or members of the families of people employed in small business? Some 24 million people are without health insurance today because their chief breadwinner belongs to a small business that cannot afford health insurance.

I think that is just too many. The high costs of health insurance have made it difficult for small businesses to get the health insurance coverage they need. They do not have the bargaining power. They cannot spread the administrative cost. They cannot spread the risk. Basically, they cannot get as good a deal as a large corporation or a union or the Government can get.

We are very fortunate, as Federal employees, to have access to the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. That is because we have a great big pool and we can bargain to get the best rates and we have choices from health insurance providers. Those choices are not available to small business. So we have developed a plan, with the full support and leadership of the President, to authorize establishing association health plans. The time has come for those health plans to be set up by legislation.

On Monday of this week, we found that there has been a jump in the number of those Americans without health insurance. It is extremely timely.

Yesterday, I understand, the Secretary of Labor wrote to the majority leader and asked that we bring up and try to pass association health plans. It has already been passed by the House. It is just sitting here.

We need to pass it. I hope before we get out of here—I hope that is October 11; I am not sure from what the majority leader said whether we will make it by October 11—but before we go, I hope we have a vote on association health plans.

The Secretary of Labor has said this is the highest priority. And the Secretary of Labor would be the one who would regulate these plans to make sure they do not cherry-pick, that they are financially sound, and that they meet the requirements of the law.

The law is carefully structured to prevent picking out only healthy insured groups. You could not set up a group of fitness instructors, for example, in a health plan because that would take the lowest risk people and give them an unfair advantage over others, when health insurance is supposed to spread the risk over a broad population.

Association health plans are just one, but a very important, step we need to take in assuring that a significant number of those 24 or more million Americans who do not have health insurance get it.

This is something I have heard from small business groups, as I have listened to them in my State and across the country, in forums of all sizes. We get e-mails. We do not get letters very

often; they still get held up in the radiation process, but when we do get letters, they are still talking about the high cost of health care.

Association health plans are one way we could give small business the power to deal with the high cost of health insurance. I have spoken to my colleagues about this before. This has been an item of great interest in our Small Business Committee. I hope more colleagues will look into this question of getting adequate and affordable health insurance coverage through association health plans.

The President has made a very strong and clear statement in favor of association health plans. I would hope this body could follow the leadership of the House of Representatives, which has already passed the association health plan legislation. This would be something very important we could do for small businesses and their employees and their employees' families.

Madam President, I am happy to respond to questions from my colleagues to provide them further information. I invite their attention and I hope we can get action on that measure.

Madam President, I yield the floor. Seeing no one seeking recognition, 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. BOND. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

ELECTION REFORM

Mr. BOND. Madam President, I was interested to read in today's Washington Post an editorial urging us to move forward on the election reform bill. This bill has been championed by Senator DODD, the chairman of the committee, and Senator MCCONNELL, the ranking member. I have had a role in some antifraud provisions.

The Florida elections of this year seem to have brought more attention to the need for election law reform. The conclusion of the Washington Post is that:

At a time when voter turnout is at an all-time low, bolstering public confidence in the machinery of democracy is especially urgent.

I agree with that. That is why I worked so hard to see if we could get a bill passed that would do that. We need to make it easier to vote and tougher to cheat. Unfortunately, what we saw in Florida this year was the old truth: No matter how much appropriations in or what kind of legislation you have, if you have incompetence in local election officials, incompetence trumps everything. We know there were tremendous problems this year in an area where there were problems in 2000, even though they had new machines.

Nevertheless, we have worked on a bill that has many compromises and

has a good structure for getting the kind of equipment we need to improve elections, providing additional safeguards, voting machines for those with disabilities and, in my view, the very important role of preventing dead people, nonexistent people, and dogs from voting.

Many of my colleagues don't want to hear me talk anymore about Ritzzy Mekler, the dog that was registered in Missouri. Unfortunately, Ritzzy joins a very distinguished group of dogs registered to vote around the country because motor voter does not have protection against phony registration.

We spent more than 7 months last year negotiating a bill. We brought it to the floor. There was some backsliding. We got it passed late this winter. It has been stalled in trying to work out the final details.

I have been discouraged because I have worked with the leaders from the other side on the bill to offer some compromises. We want to get the bill passed. I believe, along with Senator MCCONNELL, that we have proposed reasonable means of dealing with the problems they have. Unfortunately, the negotiations at the staff level have been stymied. Every time we get the wheelbarrow full of frogs, we find, as we try to wrap up the final details and get the final frogs in, some of the frogs have jumped out of the wheelbarrow.

Election reform is another bill that is long overdue for passage. I see my colleague from Kentucky in the Chamber who has been a champion in this area. I appreciate working with him and Senator DODD. I hope we can work with our colleagues on the House side, if we will just move forward and deal with some very important protections against more fraud in voting.

Since I see the manager of the bill is ready to go, I yield the floor.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I also see my friend from Kentucky. I want to go back to the bill.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I say to the Senator from Vermont, I am looking at 10 max, probably less.

Mr. LEAHY. I am wondering, I know the distinguished Senator from Kentucky can say more in less time than most people I know, and brilliantly. Could he perhaps say it in 5 minutes?

Mr. MCCONNELL. If I could beg the indulgence of the Senator from Vermont, this is a speech I have hoped to make on homeland security for some time now. We are only talking about 10 minutes. I would appreciate the opportunity to make the statement.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I am trying to be helpful. I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Kentucky be recognized for 10 minutes and then the floor revert to the senior Senator from Vermont.

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