

broadside. I saw the White House ferocity firsthand. I saw the people around the President attack JOHN MCCAIN when he ran for President in 2000. I will never forget the distortions, the recklessness, and the viciousness of those attacks. They were wrong and they impugned one of our great patriots.

I saw the same viciousness 2 years ago when Senator Max Cleland, a man who served when called during the Vietnam war, had his reputation and patriotism smeared in his reelection campaign. The idea that a man who gave so much to his country could be smeared by those who are willing to give so little haunted me then as it haunts me now. There are some things that simply ought not to be done in politics, and that line was crossed by attacks on both Senator MCCAIN and Senator Cleland.

Last year, I watched the people around the President set their sights on Ambassador Joe Wilson when he stepped forward to tell the truth about the President's claims on Iraq, Niger, and uranium. The White House did not battle Ambassador Wilson on the facts. Instead, they put his wife's life in danger by disclosing publicly that she was a deep cover agent for the CIA. That was a grossly irresponsible act done for the worst of reasons—to avoid accountability and unwelcome political consequences. It ought never have happened. It was shameful, and it crossed a line that had never been crossed before.

Now when I watch what the people around the President are trying to do to Richard Clarke, I think it is past time to say enough is enough.

The President came to Washington 4 years ago promising to change the tone. The people around him have done that. They have changed it for the worse. They are doing things that should never be done and have never been done before. What they need to do, what we all need to do, is to put politics aside and put the American people and their security first.

I know how difficult that is in an election year, but we all, every one of us needs to do exactly that. Some things are more important than politics, and September 11 ought to be at the top of the list. We need the facts on September 11, not spin and not character assassination. We need this administration and everyone involved to follow Mr. Clarke's example and accept responsibility and accountability.

We need Condoleezza Rice, who seems to have time to appear on every television show, to make time to appear publicly before the 9/11 Commission. She is not constrained by precedent from doing that, as the White House has argued. As the Congressional Research Service documented, two of her predecessors have given testimony in open session on matters much less important than September 11.

I have reluctantly reached the conclusion that what really constrains Ms.

Rice's full cooperation is political consideration. The September 11 families deserve better than that and, just as importantly, our country deserves better.

There is only one person who can change what is going on at the White House, and that is the President. So I appeal to President Bush to change it. He deserves better than the tactics his staff are using and, as I have said, the September 11 families and our country deserve better, too.

I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Would the Senator allow me to ask him a question through the Chair?

Mr. DASCHLE. Yes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. I have listened to the statement of the Democratic leader. I acknowledge what happened to Senator MCCAIN and the tragedy with Max Cleland, but one thing I did not hear the leader mention was what was done to Paul O'Neill when he published his book, "The Price of Loyalty," a man who is a certified, card-carrying conservative Republican, one of the great businessmen in the history of our country, who in effect was trashed for what he thought was good for the country.

I heard the Senator describe Joe Wilson and what was done to his wife and Richard Clarke, but the one thing the leader undersold—in keeping with the modesty of the minority leader and I want the record to reflect—is what has happened to the leader. By virtue of the fact that 48 other Democrats, in a period of over 10 years, have selected the Senator from South Dakota as our leader, as a result of that the Senator does things for the caucus. I am sure the caucus is not 100-percent headed in the right direction, but we do our best to try to, and when there is ever anything that is done that is not in keeping with what this White House wants, the leader is attacked, his family is attacked, his religion is attacked, his ethics are attacked. For those of us who serve with the Senator from South Dakota, we know what a wonderful family he has, what a loving family he has, what a moral person he is, and what a good leader he is.

I want the record to reflect that the Senator from South Dakota has tremendously undersold—all of these people we have mentioned who have been brutally assaulted, in my opinion, do not compare with what has happened to TOM DASCHLE himself.

I want the Senator to know that the entire caucus stands behind him for the great leader he has been, and we apologize for what has happened to him by virtue of the fact that he is our leader. If he were not our leader, someone else would be attacked; their religion would be attacked; their families would be attacked. Speaking for 48 other Democrats, we all admire and respect the work the Senator from South Dakota has done and are sorry that he has had to take the blows he has by being one

of the great leaders in the history of our country.

Mr. DASCHLE. I thank the Senator from Nevada for his very kind words, and I thank my colleagues for yielding the floor to accommodate my leader time this morning.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business until 10:30 a.m. The majority leader or his designee will control the first half of this time and the minority leader or his designee will control the remaining time.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum, and have the time run equally on both sides.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H. R. 4

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader in consultation with the Democratic leader on Monday, March 29, the Senate proceed to consideration of H.R. 4, the welfare reauthorization bill.

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

WELFARE REFORM EXTENSION ACT OF 2004

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2231, which was introduced earlier today by Senators GRASSLEY and BAUCUS.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2231) to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant program through June 30th, 2004, and for other purposes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my understanding the majority leader has indicated there will be no votes on Monday. Is that true?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I say to my friend from Nevada, that is true.

Mr. REID. No objection.

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

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and

passed, the motion to reconsider by laid upon the table, and any statements regarding this matter appear in the RECORD at this point.

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

The bill (S. 2231) was read the third time and passed, as follows:

S. 2231

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Welfare Reform Extension Act of 2004".

SEC. 2. EXTENSION OF THE TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM THROUGH JUNE 30, 2004.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Activities authorized by part A of title IV of the Social Security Act, and by sections 510, 1108(b), and 1925 of such Act, shall continue through June 30, 2004, in the manner authorized for fiscal year 2002, notwithstanding section 1902(e)(1)(A) of such Act, and out of any money in the Treasury of the United States not otherwise appropriated, there are hereby appropriated such sums as may be necessary for such purpose. Grants and payments may be made pursuant to this authority through the third quarter of fiscal year 2004 at the level provided for such activities through the third quarter of fiscal year 2002.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 403(a)(3)(H)(ii) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 603(a)(3)(H)(ii)) is amended by striking "March 31" and inserting "June 30".

SEC. 3. EXTENSION OF THE NATIONAL RANDOM SAMPLE STUDY OF CHILD WELFARE AND CHILD WELFARE WAIVER AUTHORITY THROUGH JUNE 30, 2004.

Activities authorized by sections 429A and 1130(a) of the Social Security Act shall continue through June 30, 2004, in the manner authorized for fiscal year 2002, and out of any money in the Treasury of the United States not otherwise appropriated, there are hereby appropriated such sums as may be necessary for such purpose. Grants and payments may be made pursuant to this authority through the third quarter of fiscal year 2004 at the level provided for such activities through the third quarter of fiscal year 2002.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

THE MARINES

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I will make some comments in morning business. First of all, I had the privilege this morning of attending a meeting of Marines, which we have periodically, and I was very pleased to listen to a report from the commandant about the current situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. Certainly, he is very pleased with what is happening there with regard to our military, what they are able to do and accomplish there. We do not hear much about the good stuff that is going on. We hear, of course, the news on bad things. It was an excellent report. Certainly we are very proud of our Marines and all of our service personnel there.

HEALTH INSURANCE COSTS

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I take a few minutes today to talk about an

issue I am sure we are all concerned about and interested in. As I go about Wyoming and talk to people, particularly in town meetings, the issue that arises most often and with the most passion is the high cost of health insurance. The cost of health insurance is directly related to the cost of health care. What we hear the most about is from people who are in private business, farmers and ranchers, who provide all of their own health care costs, which have become increasingly prohibitive. It seems to me we are going to have to focus properly on Medicare, Medicaid, veterans, those government programs for which we are responsible. I suggest we need to focus now and begin to take a look at the broader picture of health care. We have a system that has available certainly some of the best health care in the world, but the key is to have access. If the cost limits access, we have a problem.

We have some unique features in Wyoming. Because of a small population, we cannot have all the various professional services in every small town. There has to be a system. We have worked at that. There are several hospitals with the different kinds of specialties that help serve communities. We have had more and more critical access facilities which make it easier for small communities to work.

I visited Dubois, WY, this week, a new clinic to a small town. I also met with a group of physicians and hospital operators in Cheyenne. We talked about some of these issues. Before it was over, these professionals, these providers, indicated they agree this system is broken and there needs to be some kind of change made in the future. I don't know the answer. I don't know that anyone yet knows the answer. I suggest to my fellow Members of the Senate and the House, we need to begin to take a look.

If I can start out by saying I am not one who favors a Federal socialized medicine program, we need to find some ways to do something with what we have now.

National health expenditures grew \$1.6 trillion in 2002, a 9.3-percent increase over the previous year. The costs of health care generally have gone up 15 percent a year for several years.

It is hard to sustain 15-percent growth, particularly when, increasingly, health care for families is a relatively large portion of expenditures.

Health care as a share of GDP in 2002 was 14.9 percent, up from 14.1 percent in 2001. So we are seeing substantial increases. And over the years those increases have continued.

So one has to ask, if the costs are going up 15 percent a year, how long can you sustain that? What do we need to do? Folks are seeing double-digit premium increases each year, including Federal employees. So it is quite obvious to me that we cannot continue to grow rates at that level.

I indicated I had talked to some folks who certainly agree we need to deal

with that. We face more challenges in the health care system than just reforming the public programs or addressing the nearly 42 million people—15 percent—who do not have health insurance.

There are some things, of course, we need to consider. We need to improve the underlying health care infrastructure. Its rising costs affect all of us. I think we have to take some of the responsibility for fixing that system.

We have a health care system today where, for instance, hospital charges do not reflect the actual costs because of public and private insurance reimbursements. I recently met with a hospital CEO in my hometown. At that hospital they had some very interesting topics they talked about. Their gross charges, for example, were \$202 million; \$80 million was written off; \$120.7 million reflects actual costs; \$1.4 million was income from insurance, and they had \$3.3 million in other income. This is not a large profit margin.

What does that mean? No. 1, Medicare does not pay to the level of actual costs. Now, you may say, well, we need to keep the cost of Medicare down. That is true. On the other hand, if their payment is not equal to the cost, then someone else has to bear the cost; Medicaid even more so.

Medicaid pays even a smaller percentage of the actual cost than does Medicare. This is a combination, of course, of State and Federal programs. So we find that situation.

Charity, for those who are uninsured, for those who come in and are not able to pay, we still take them, of course. Trauma care, sometimes, is reimbursed by the county or the State. But if someone has an accident and arrives at the hospital, they are given care, of course, whether they have the ability to pay, whether they have insurance. And guess who pays the principal cost of that. Those who have insurance.

People who are insured represent about 35 percent of the people in a hospital, but they pay 98 percent of the cost. So what we are doing basically is taking the costs that are there, and those who have commercial insurance are paying a very large percentage of that cost. Therefore, we are shifting costs from the broad user base to a relatively small group who buy insurance, which causes the private insurance to be higher.

So there are some weaknesses there. Certainly, we have to do something about it. Health providers must shift this cost to private insurance or they do not make it up.

Emergency room costs, of course, are extremely expensive. They are used a great deal, particularly with Medicaid where there is no first-dollar payment by anyone. When anything goes wrong for someone who is under Medicaid, they can go to the emergency room because it does not cost anything.

Of course, we pay the highest prices for prescription drugs and shoulder the research and development costs for