

the SCHIP Program. We should not at this time be taking steps backward by reducing coverage for low-income and vulnerable populations that primarily include the children I have been referring to.

I urge that colleagues support the Baucus motion to instruct conferees on Medicaid. We are coming into the holiday season. This is not a time when we, the wealthiest Nation in the world, should be cutting health care assistance to the low-income children of this country. I did not support the Senate budget reconciliation bill for a variety of reasons, but even with the imperfections that were in that bill, it was far superior to the House budget package. For one thing, it does not contain the type of cuts for children's health that are included in the House bill.

I urge my colleagues to recognize how much better the Senate bill is for the health and well-being of our Nation's children. I urge my colleagues to vote to instruct conferees to support the Senate's approach over that of the House of Representatives.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

BUDGET RECONCILIATION

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, at the appropriate time I will be sending a motion to instruct to the desk. I will be doing that at a later time. In the meantime, I rise to speak on that motion.

The motion instructs the Senate conferees on the spending reconciliation bill not to bring back a conference report that hurts Medicaid beneficiaries. This is the item about which the Senator from New Mexico just spoke.

Last month, the House passed such a bill, one that would hurt Medicaid beneficiaries. The House passed a bill that would cut health care for millions of seniors and lower income Americans who depend on Medicaid.

I believe the Senate should reject these harmful cuts. In early November, the Senate voted by a thin margin to cut Medicaid, our Nation's safety net health program for low-income Americans. Many of us at that time objected to those cuts. That day, the Senate bill planted a seed of opportunity to make even more harmful cuts, hurting millions of low-income children, seniors, pregnant women, and individuals with disabilities. Just 2 weeks ago, the Senate reconciliation bill bore bitter fruit. Why? Because the Medicaid cuts in the House bill turned out to be substantial and, in fact, will hurt millions of the poorest and neediest among us.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, most of the Medicaid savings in the House bill come from targeting our poorest citizens. CBO says three-quarters of the House bill's Medicaid savings come from provisions that increase costs, cut benefits, or impair access to services for low-income individuals. These cuts will affect millions of

people. The CBO estimates that about 17 million Medicaid enrollees will pay more under the House bill, and half of those paying more will be children.

Who will these cuts affect? Medicaid now serves more than 50 million low-income Americans. A quarter are children. A quarter are seniors and disabled. The rest are pregnant women, low-income parents, and individuals with serious medical needs.

Many believe that all low-income Americans are eligible for Medicaid. That is not the case. Often only the very poor qualify. On average, a non-working parent making about \$150 per week for a family of three makes too much for Medicaid. Again, a non-working parent of a family of three making about \$150 a week makes too much for Medicaid. That is less than one-half the Federal poverty level.

Eligibility levels for working parents are also low. On average, a working parent with a family of three earning more than \$5.50 an hour also makes too much to qualify for Medicaid. So we are talking about the very poor.

Under the House bill, these needy individuals will pay more for less. CBO estimates that about 80 percent of the savings from increasing cost sharing would come from decreased use of health care services. Some may say that increasing cost sharing will curb waste, abuse. I am not saying we cannot or should not look at reducing unnecessary treatments under Medicaid. Far from it. But increasing cost sharing is not the right way to do it.

Increasing costs deters patients from seeking health care services, both good and bad services. If we really want to control overuse of services, we should be investing in care management strategies for expensive chronic diseases such as diabetes. These strategies have proven to lower cost while increasing the quality of care.

Increasing enrollee cost sharing can also have unintended systemwide effects. Many States have already said they will deduct the new copayment fees from provider rates regardless of whether providers collect the fees. The result puts the new burden on doctors and clinics and hospitals serving our health safety net. Many of these providers will be forced to make up uncompensated care costs by increasing private market rates, which will drive up health care costs for all of us, leading to more uninsured and an even greater need for Medicaid.

Even more troubling, the House bill's premium increases will result in tens of thousands of individuals losing Medicaid coverage. According to CBO, about a quarter of the savings from the premium increases are for individuals losing coverage. We don't need to rely on CBO to know that this will actually happen. Why? Because in the State of Oregon, this was tried, and the results were quite clear and disturbing. That State began to enforce nominal monthly premiums for higher income Medicaid beneficiaries. What happened? Or-

gon saw its enrollment drop by nearly one-half in 10 months. Nearly 50,000 individuals lost coverage.

This increased cost sharing amounts to a tax on poor families now in Medicaid. For a family of three with income at 135 percent of poverty, annual cost sharing would be as high as \$1,086 per year or, stated another way, about 60 percent of their annual Federal tax liability.

Let me say that again. For a family of three, with income at 135 percent of poverty, annual cost-sharing could be as high as over \$1,000, which amounts to less than 60 percent of their annual Federal tax liability. In effect, it is a tax—a big tax, about 60 percent of their Federal tax. Add them together and it is about 160 percent of tax they are paying.

Many of these poor individuals would also be forced to pay more to get less. How? Because the House allows States to cut Medicaid benefits.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that 5 million enrollees would see their benefits cut over the next 10 years. Half of those affected would be children. Higher income children would no longer have guaranteed access to medically necessary care under Medicaid.

It is also unclear whether individuals with disabilities and chronic conditions would be protected. This could undermine access to more expensive treatments and services for those individuals who turn to Medicaid because the private market will not cover them.

Shifting costs and cutting benefits for our poorest and least able to pay is not the smart way to preserve our Nation's safety net for future generations.

In the Finance Committee, many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle chose to support the Senate bill because it didn't include changes that would hurt Medicaid beneficiaries. My friend and colleague, Finance Chairman GRASSLEY, praised the bill, saying it "protects Medicaid benefits for the most vulnerable in our society."

The Senator from Oregon, Mr. SMITH, said that "the reconciliation package we are considering today is not only fiscally responsible, but also morally defensible. This is a bill that protects the less fortunate among us. It takes pains to preserve the vital safety net programs that millions of Americans rely on."

And the junior Senator from Pennsylvania said during the committee markup:

Let us set the record straight. We are not cutting health care services to the beneficiary.

So today I will offer this motion to set the record straight on Medicaid cuts. This motion instructs Senate conferees on the reconciliation bill to reject changes to Medicaid that would hurt Medicaid beneficiaries or undermine Medicaid's guarantee. Given the threat of the cuts passed in the House, the Senate must take a stand in support of the neediest among us.

Let us ensure that we keep the record straight on Medicaid. Let us ensure that we do no harm to the vulnerable individuals whom Medicare serves. Let us pass this motion.

Mr. President, at the appropriate time I will make the motion.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I, too, at the appropriate moment will offer a motion to instruct the conferees. I will offer the motion in conjunction with Senators COLLINS, KENNEDY, SNOWE, LIEBERMAN, LEAHY, BINGAMAN, COLEMAN, SALAZAR, STABENOW, CLINTON, LUGAR, HARKIN, LEVIN, SMITH, and PRYOR.

This motion to instruct conferees is about LIHEAP, the Low Income Heating Assistance Program. Each of us, at this point, is very familiar with the struggle that is taking place today. If you were in New England over the weekend, as I was, or in many other parts of the country, you understand that temperatures have fallen and many families are having to perform a juggling act with their budgets in order to heat their homes.

According to EIA's most recent short-term energy outlook, released last week, energy costs for the average family using heating oil are estimated to hit \$1,454 this winter, an increase of \$255. That is a 21-percent increase over last year's heating season. Natural gas prices could hit \$1,024 for an average family using natural gas. That would be an increase of \$282 or a 38-percent increase. For a family using propane, prices are projected to hit \$1,269, an increase of \$167 from last heating season, and that is a 15-percent increase.

Despite these sharp increases in fuel costs, we sadly continue to fund LIHEAP—the one program that can provide sufficient help to these families—at the same level as last year, which in reality means an actual cut in the level of assistance we can provide low-income consumers this winter's heating season.

The responsible thing for Congress to do is to fully fund LIHEAP at the full \$5.1 billion authorized in the Energy Policy Act enacted earlier this year. Indeed, we have tried to do that on numerous occasions. Today marks the fifth time in the last 2 months that Senator COLLINS and I, along with some 30 other colleagues, have made an attempt to fully fund LIHEAP. We offered amendments to the Defense bill, the Transportation-Treasury-HUD bill, Labor-HHS bill and, most recently, the tax reconciliation bill. On each occasion, we reach across the aisle and across the country to provide more assistance for the LIHEAP program. While we did not reach the 60-vote margin needed to pass these amendments under the budget rules, in each instance, a majority of this body was on record supporting full funding for LIHEAP.

My preference, of course, was to provide funding to fully fund LIHEAP on

an emergency basis through an appropriations bill. Those opportunities have passed. Budget reconciliation is the last train that is leaving the station. That is why I come to the floor and will offer, at the appropriate time, a motion to instruct budget conferees to insist on a level of funding for LIHEAP that is sufficient to fully fund the program at its fully authorized level.

The heat-or-eat dilemma is not just rhetoric. The RAND Corporation conducted a study and found that low-income households reduced food expenditures by roughly the same amount as increases in fuel expenditures. In some respects, this is a tidal wave not of rising water, like Katrina, but of rising energy prices.

We have all had the opportunity to visit our constituents and get a firsthand glimpse of the struggle they are faced with. A few weeks ago, I visited with Mr. Aram Ohanian, an 88-year-old veteran of the U.S. Army in World War II, living on a \$779-a-month Social Security check. Money is so tight that he sometimes has to eat with his children or go to a local soup kitchen. He also gets assistance from our Rhode Island food bank. These heating price increases to Mr. Ohanian will be very difficult. He received LIHEAP assistance last year, but that assistance will be relatively less this year because of rising prices and greater demand.

Last month, the Social Security Administration announced that cost-of-living adjustments for 2006, on average, are about \$65. That \$65 increase to Mr. Ohanian is not going to take up the slack in terms of these tremendous increases in fuel prices.

The motion to instruct conferees that we will submit at the appropriate moment calls for LIHEAP to be funded at the fully authorized level. Under the best-case scenario, if we fully fund LIHEAP, there would still be a significant number of Americans who qualify for the program but will not get any help. LIHEAP would still only serve about one-seventh of 35 million households that are poor enough to qualify for assistance. But at least we are taking a step by fully funding this important program.

I urge my colleagues to support this motion when it comes to the floor for a vote.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

Mr. GREGG. I ask for the regular order, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in morning business with 10 minutes for Senators.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, we are trying, as the Senate and as a Congress, to wrap up the business for the Government this year. A major part of that effort is to complete the budget process. Included in the budget were two directions to the Congress, which were voted in by a majority of the Con-

gress—regrettably, very few people from the other side of the aisle supported it—and one of the directions was, for the first time in 8 years, to attempt to bring under control the rate of growth of entitlement spending.

Anybody who looks reasonably at the Federal Government—and let's take an independent view here and the view specifically of Chairman Greenspan, who recently gave a speech in London where he pointed out that the biggest concern he has from the standpoint of fiscal policy was the burgeoning costs of the Federal Government which were being driven by entitlement spending, and which would explode as the baby boom generation began to retire in 2008 and become an untenable burden for the children of the baby boom generation and their children as they have to pay the taxes or costs of supporting that retired generation which is so large.

This bill, in what I consider to be the first act of fiscal responsibility of significance in the last 8 years, moved legislation that said the Congress, for the first time in 8 years, will address the issue of entitlements.

Now, the savings being projected in the bill were not that dramatic and they continue to be not that dramatic. They are large numbers, obviously, but in the context of the total spending on entitlements, they are not that large.

For example, the savings that are being projected in the area of Medicaid are about \$10 billion over 5 years. But what you have to understand—and that is a big number—is over that period, Medicaid will be spending approximately \$1.4 trillion—trillion dollars. So we are actually asking for less than a one-tenth of 1 percent reduction in the rate of growth in Medicaid, and Medicaid during that period will grow at 40 percent—a 40-percent growth rate over those 5 years, down from 41 percent, assuming we make the \$10 billion reduction over the 10 years in the rate of growth.

The total deficit reduction bill was to be somewhere in the range of \$35 billion to \$50 billion, depending on which bill was taken from which House. It left the Senate at \$39 billion and left the House of Representatives at about \$50 billion, \$51 billion, something like that; I am not sure. In any event, it is going to fall somewhere between those two numbers.

We as a Congress hopefully can pass legislation that accomplishes that goal which starts to reduce the rate of growth of entitlements and reduces the debt of the Government to at least \$40 billion—hopefully more than that, \$45 billion, \$46 billion over the next 5 years. This is the responsible thing to do, and it will be the first act of significant fiscal responsibility in which we have participated in a while around here as we continue to pass in the entitlement area—there has been significant fiscal responsibility in the non-defense discretionary area executed by the Appropriations Committee under,

again, the budget which essentially froze nondefense discretionary spending and put in place what is known as caps so we can enforce them.

Ironically, none of these proposals for fiscal responsibility put in place have received any significant support from the other side of the aisle. When the budget passed this Congress, I don't think any Members from the other side of the aisle voted for it. When the reconciliation bill passed this Congress, two Members from the other side of the aisle—I appreciate it very much—the Senator from Louisiana and the Senator from Nebraska voted for it, but other than that, no one else on the other side of the aisle voted for fiscal responsibility or an attempt to reduce the rate of growth of the Government. So this has become a lifting exercise in which, for all practical purposes, Republican Members of the Congress appear to be ready to participate.

Yet today we are hearing from the other side of the aisle that they want to instruct the conferees of a bill, against which they voted—they voted against the budget, which was the underlying bill—instruct the conferees how the conference should occur. I find that to be a touch inconsistent—to be kind, a touch inconsistent, a big touch inconsistent, to be honest. Here they are, folks who have not voted for any fiscal restraint and, in fact, as we moved through the appropriations process have suggested that we add \$500 billion of new spending to the Federal Government under the appropriations process, which is not, by the way, impacted under this deficit reduction bill because this is entitlement activity, the two accounts being separate, appropriations being one-time annual expenditures of the Government, entitlements being programs which people have a right to and, therefore, they can go out and receive funding. They may be veterans, they may be low-income individuals, they may be students—they have a right to receive funding. It goes on independent of annual legislation.

As I said, the other side of the aisle not only has not supported the efforts of fiscal responsibility by voting for either the budget or the vast majority, with the two exceptions I mentioned, not voting for a deficit reduction bill, but now come forward with a series of what are going to be instructions to the conferees as to how the conferees should act after they voted against passing the bill and moving forward with the legislation. Chutzpah is an understatement for that type of approach.

Let's just take one or two examples and discuss them for a second. For example, the Senator from Rhode Island was talking about LIHEAP. There is significant irony in the position of the Senator from Rhode Island—significant irony. To begin with, he voted against the one proposal that we could have passed—which was funded—which would have funded LIHEAP to keep

people protected from the increase in oil costs. It was paid for. That amendment was offered by myself. It was paid for with an across-the-board cut in the Labor-HHS bill. It would have fully funded the LIHEAP account at a level which would have held harmless everybody who receives LIHEAP money, low-income energy assistance, because we all realize the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program is a critical program and there is going to be significant stress, especially in the Northern States, as a result of the increased costs of the price of oil. And yet this was opposed.

When this opportunity came along, it was opposed for political reasons, if nothing else, I suspect, because they wanted to make a claim that they were going to fund LIHEAP at a level that was significantly higher than what CBO and what the Energy Department and what everyone else said was needed, including the Health and Human Services Department, to hold the program harmless, to keep the people funded who needed to be funded.

That increase, which was required, was a \$1.2 billion increase. You don't have to listen to me to believe that. Take a look at the letter the Senator from Rhode Island sent out asking that the funding in LIHEAP be increased—it was signed by I think 44 Members of the Senate—be at a level that held harmless the system so people who receive money under LIHEAP would get the money they needed. What was the number in that letter? The number was \$1.2 billion. But suddenly, in order to promote an agenda which had nothing to do with making sure the people were held harmless but had a lot to do with maybe headlines, we find the number being asked for is another \$1.5 billion on top of that. It is not paid for, not offset. Just run up the debt and put money into an account far in excess of what that account needs to do the job right.

In fact, as a result of the warm season in November in many of the Northern States and the result of the softening, to some degree, of oil prices, especially home heating oil prices, the number has now dropped. It is down below \$1.2 billion, according to the estimates I have been seeing, to hold the system harmless. I am still willing to go to the \$1.2 billion level and have it paid for. That is the way it should be done. You have to set priorities. You live in a household, and this is all about households trying to make ends meet. They set priorities.

One of the priorities should be that the Federal Government should not pass the bills in an energy program today which pays for oil that is purchased today and given out today on to our children and our grandchildren to pay through debt. We should pay for it ourselves. We should be willing as a Congress to step up and say: Yes, this is an important program; yes, it should be funded at a level that holds everybody harmless and makes sure they get

the support they need, but also it should be paid for by the generation that is going to benefit from it or at least the Government that is taking advantage of it. It should not be passed on to the next generation as a bill to our kids because our kids are also probably going to have cold winters, and they sure are going to have tough energy issues because we haven't solved any of those issues around here. We passed an energy bill that was filled with a lot of vertical subsidies but didn't have a whole lot of good energy policy in it; a little bit, a little bit of good energy policy and a lot of bad policy which was basically driven by interest groups around here, but it sure didn't do anything to make us more long-term solvent in the area of energy.

One item that might address that is the issue of producing more energy for our country, and that, of course, is a big issue in this bill, and we will get into that in a later discussion.

The point here is we are being asked to vote for the reconciliation bill when it comes out of conference. We are being asked to instruct the conferees to add another \$2.9 billion of debt onto our children's backs rather than doing an appropriate action which is what I suspect the conference will do, which is increase the money in the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program by \$1.2 billion, or something in that range, and have it paid for within the context of the entire deficit reduction bill, which is the fiscally responsible way to approach this issue.

This will make a good press release, and it will obviously make a good political ad, but I hope there will be a followup statement and maybe even a followup political ad, maybe paid for by our kids or grandkids which says: Hey, why are you doing this to us? Why do you not take responsibility for your generations? Why are you giving us a bill for oil and heat for this year when we may have the same bills to deal with when we retire or when our children have to take care of us in retirement 10, 15 years from now?

Let us do this the right way. Let us make this system solvent, not only solvent but make the system—put in the system the funds that are necessary to make sure that people who need the low-income energy assistance can get it under the higher oil prices, and then let us pay for it. Set a priority and say there are some things we can afford, some things we cannot afford, and in the Federal Government let us make the decisions to reduce the things we cannot afford and pay for the things we need, which specifically would be this proposal for low-income energy assistance at \$1.2 billion. But that is not the politics of this institution.

So I do hope we will pass a reconciliation bill, otherwise known as a deficit reduction bill, and I do hope it will step forward and reduce the debt by somewhere around \$45 billion or \$46 billion, maybe more, and that in that process

we will address the low-income energy assistance program and make sure that it is funded at a level that is necessary in order to make sure people are held harmless, and low-income individuals who need energy can afford it to heat their homes and do not have to make difficult choices. But we should all do it within the context of prioritizing the responsibilities of the Federal Government today and not pass our responsibilities today on to our children and our children's children tomorrow by deficit-financing this event.

So we are going to get these instructions. I guess there has been some unanimous consent agreement worked out. There are going to be about seven proposals, instructions to conferees. I just hope that as we go through these instructions people will have the intellectual integrity to ask the question, if they did not vote for the bill, if they did not vote for the budget which was trying to control spending, and they did not vote for the deficit reduction bill which is trying to control spending, why are they coming to the floor and suddenly telling the conferees how they should go about hitting their targets which are part of the bill, which they did not vote for, and they do not support? Maybe we will hear somebody preface their request for instructions with an explanation of that point.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

ASBESTOS

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, Libby, MT, is a special place. Libby is a city of more than 2,600 people in Lincoln County, in the northwest corner of Montana. It rests in a valley high in the Rocky Mountains, on the green Kootenai River between the Cabinet and Percell Mountains.

Libby is not a rich city. In 2000, the median family income in Libby was just under \$30,000. That compares with just over \$40,000 in all of Montana, and just over \$50,000 in all of America.

Across the river, and 9 miles northeast of the town, rises a mountain that they call Zonolite Mountain. Until 1990, the W.R. Grace Company used to mine vermiculite there in the mountain.

Vermiculite is shiny mineral. Heat it, and it pops like popcorn. People used to pop vermiculite to make building insulation. They called the popped vermiculite "Zonolite."

The layers of rock where people found the vermiculite contained harmful asbestos. And the vermiculite outside Libby is laced with a especially dangerous type of asbestos, called tremolite.

Tremolite is the most toxic form of asbestos. Tremolite has long fibers that are barbed like fishhooks. These fibers work their way into soft lung tissue. These fibers do not come out.

Until the mid-1970s, W.R. Grace processed the vermiculite mined in Libby

in a nearby mill. The mill was so dusty that workers often could not see their hands on their brooms. Dust was everywhere. Mill workers swept dust outside. They dumped it down the mountainside. I remember seeing employees come out of the mine off the bus so caked with dust I wondered what in the world is going on here. I never knew any working conditions to be so dusty.

The mill's ventilation stack spewed the dust into the air. The ventilation stack released 5,000 pounds of asbestos every day. When the wind blew from the east, a deadly white dust would cover the town.

For decades, 24 hours a day, the dust fell all over Libby. Dust fell on Libby's gardens. Dust fell on Libby's homes. Dust fell on Libby's high school track. Dust fell on Libby's playgrounds.

Some of the vermiculite went downtown to a plant, right next to the baseball diamonds. The plant popped the vermiculite into Zonolite. Batches of Zonolite spilled all around the plant.

Kids played in the Zonolite. People brought home bags of Zonolite to pour into the attics. People put Zonolite in their walls. People put Zonolite in their gardens. People put vermiculite and ore in road beds. People used vermiculite and ore as aggregate in their driveways.

An article in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* would later conclude:

Given the ubiquitous nature of vermiculite contamination in Libby, along with historical evidence of elevated asbestos concentrations in the air, it would be difficult to find participants who could be characterized as unexposed.

Every day, men from the valley went to the mountain to work in the mine and the mill. Every day, these men came home, covered with the fine, deadly white powder.

The powder got into their clothes. The powder got into their curtains. The powder covered their floors.

The fine fibers of tremolite asbestos are easy to inhale. Miners inhaled fibers in the mine. Workers inhaled fibers at the mill. Wives inhaled fibers when they washed their husband's clothes. Children inhaled fibers when they played on the carpet.

And those fibers caused respiratory disease. Those fibers caused a serious lung disease called asbestosis. And those fibers caused a serious form of cancer, mesothelioma, which plagues the chest and abdominal cavities.

Tremolite asbestos causes unique diseases. These diseases are highly progressive and deceptive. These diseases often result in severe impairment or death, without the typical warning markers that show up on x-rays. Without the usual medical signals, the people of Libby often went undiagnosed.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry found that people from Libby suffer from asbestos-related disease at a rate 40-to-60 times the national average. People from Libby suffer from the asbestos cancer

mesothelioma at a rate 100 times the national average.

Because of the W.R. Grace mine and the mill, hundreds of people in Libby died from asbestos-related diseases. And hundreds of current and former area residents are now ill.

The people in Libby will be plagued by asbestos for years to come. These diseases can take 40 years to appear. Hundreds more will fall victim to these diseases in the future.

Now, the people of Libby must watch their neighbors struggle to tend their gardens. They must watch their neighbors struggle to walk to the café. They must watch their neighbors struggle to provide a future for their children. And they must wonder if they, too, will fall ill.

Hundreds of people live in discomfort. Hundreds of people live in pain. "It took my mother 17 months to slowly suffocate," said Gayla Benefield.

After Gayla's mother died in 1996, Gayla and her sister sued W.R. Grace. They brought only the second such lawsuit to be decided by a jury in Libby. W.R. Grace had quietly settled dozens of other claims with agreements of secrecy.

In 1999, the Environmental Protection Agency started to investigate. The EPA found tremolite contamination in the air around the nursery. They found it near the ball fields. They found it inside homes.

The EPA started cleaning up. The entire community of Libby was designated a Superfund site. Libby was listed on the EPA's National Priorities List.

The EPA concluded:

The occurrence of non-occupational asbestos-related disease that has been observed among Libby residents is extremely unusual, and has not been associated with asbestos mines elsewhere, suggesting either very high and prolonged environmental exposures and/or increased toxicity of this form of amphibole asbestos.

The EPA has worked hard. The EPA has shown a good response and solid clean-up work. And the EPA is committed to finishing the job. I commend them. I made many visits to Libby—many, many times. I talked with EPA officials over the years, and I think they have done a pretty good job.

The EPA has identified more than a thousand properties in Libby that still need cleaning up.

The agency has pushed back the timeframe for cleaning up the town from 2004 to 2008. After having been in Libby for 3 years, the agency had completed only 10 percent of the cleanup work needed to give the town a clean bill of health. The EPA must keep Libby a priority.

In 1999, I was the first high-ranking elected official to visit Libby. Since the winter of 1999, I have gone to Libby 16 times. I have worked hard to get funds to help with cleanup, health care, and economic development.

I have looked into the eyes of people in Libby. I have seen mothers and fathers, sister and brothers, husbands