

progress. I hope this year will be different, and that the administration and the congressional leadership will finally make health care a priority.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that more than 45 million Americans lack health insurance—that is one out of every six people. Wisconsin fares slightly better with 11 percent of our population without health coverage.

These numbers have increased every year since 1999. All across the country, families and businesses are struggling to afford basic health care, and too many are losing the battle.

Government joined the fray, with some success, in the past. In 1997, Congress created the State Children's Health Insurance Program, which led to the BadgerCare program in Wisconsin. Since SCHIP's inception, the program has provided medical coverage and care to millions of children throughout the Nation who otherwise would have gone without. In addition, States have stepped in to provide a safety net for the poorest of the poor through Medicaid and high-risk insurance pools.

Despite these gains, many working families still need help. According to a report by the nonpartisan Commonwealth Fund, 41 percent of working-age Americans with incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000 a year were uninsured for at least part of 2005. This is a dramatic increase from 2001, when just 28 percent of those with moderate incomes were uninsured.

This is an alarming statistic but not surprising. Skyrocketing health care costs have rendered insurance unaffordable to most families and businesses. In 1996, annual premiums for employers grew by 0.8 percent; by 2003, that growth averaged 13.9 percent. Last year, the average premium jumped 9.2 percent, and some areas of Wisconsin saw increases of as much as 24 percent.

All employers struggle with the costs of health care, but none more than the small employer. Many have stopped offering health insurance altogether, swelling the number of uninsured full-time workers.

Congress could help employers to continue providing health insurance by passing the Small Employers Health Benefits Program Act, which I cosponsored. The legislation, modeled after the health insurance system available to Federal workers, allows small employers to band together to purchase health insurance for their employees and negotiate better prices. It also gives employers a refundable tax credit to help with the costs of providing insurance for low-income employees.

Helping employers afford health care premiums is only part of the answer; we also must tackle the problem of escalating health care costs driven largely by the rising cost of prescription drugs. Americans pay the highest prices in the world for medicines sold in other countries for a fraction of the cost. I support reforms such as allowing Americans to purchase less expen-

sive prescription drugs from Canada and other countries with strong protections to ensure the safety of those medicines. I have also cosponsored legislation to speed to market generic drugs, which cost much less than their brand-name counterparts. And I believe we must allow Medicare to negotiate directly with drug companies for lower prices for seniors participating in the new Medicare drug benefit.

America is the leader of the world in health care innovation. We have the highest per-capita spending on health care of any developed nation, but we rank at the bottom when it comes to health insurance coverage.

That is inexcusable. For too long we have said the right things, but failed to take concrete action. Let's make the next year different. Next year, we should spend this week celebrating real progress rather than lamenting another year of inaction. Another year of empty rhetoric and pointing fingers will get us no closer to the goal of ensuring all Americans reliable, affordable health coverage. I stand ready to work with those on both sides of the aisle who are interested in making a real difference in the coming year.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING TAFT HIGH SCHOOL

• Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the students of the Taft High School Academic Decathlon Team on becoming this year's 2006 National Champions.

Each year, the U.S. Academic Decathlon tests our Nation's best and brightest in a host of subjects including calculus, writing, impromptu speaking, music, and art history. The competition is consistently among the most rigorous in the country.

Amassing an outstanding 51,659 points out of a possible 60,000, Taft High School earned one of the most sweeping and significant victories in recent decathlon history. As one decathlon official noted, "I've never seen anything like this."

These students could not have achieved this memorable accomplishment without the tremendous support and encouragement from their dedicated teachers and parents.

I commend the team coach Dr. Arthur Berchin and Taft High School faculty and administrators for their invaluable guidance, and I applaud the participants' parents for their unwavering dedication and commitment to helping these students reach their full potential.

I would also like to recognize team members Zachary Ellington, Michael Farrell, Farhan Khan, David Lopez, David Novgorodsky, Julia Rebrova, Atish Sawant, Dean Schaffer, and Monica Schettler for their tremendous poise and determination. I encourage them to continue the hard work and

perseverance that have brought them this victory. They are wonderful examples of true scholarship, and have made Taft High School, the county of Los Angeles, and the State of California very proud.

What is more extraordinary is that each Taft High School team member placed first, second, or third in all ten of their individual events, totaling 43 medals and capturing 7 of the top 9 awards for individual performance.

Equally important, the Taft High School Academic Decathlon Team is one strengthened by diversity, including students from Russia and Bangladesh. Good schools, like good societies and good families, celebrate and cherish diversity.

Many of these students have decided to take their scholastic successes to the next level, and will attend a myriad of prestigious colleges and universities in the fall. All participants have already taken undergraduate-level courses, and their passionate pursuit of academic excellence is indeed noteworthy.

Once again, I would like to honor the entire Taft High School Academic Decathlon Team on a well-deserved victory. Each of these students holds wonderful promise and I applaud them for their many achievements. Their futures are bright and their performance will continue to serve as an inspiration to us all. •

HAL DAVID CELEBRATES HIS 85TH BIRTHDAY

• Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, May 25th marks the 85th birthday of an extraordinary American artist—Hal David. Hal is one of America's most prolific and beloved lyricists, and I congratulate him as he celebrates this birthday and a lifetime of memorable songs.

Hal David's music has been entertaining millions for generations. His collaborations with Burt Bacharach on songs performed by Dionne Warwick are legendary. He has won the hearts of music lovers of all ages, and has earned 20 gold records, several Grammys, and an Academy Award.

Over the years he has also earned the immense respect of his colleagues nationally and internationally. He was elected to the Songwriter's Hall of Fame and awarded their prestigious Johnny Mercer Award. He received the Grammy Trustee Award from the Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, and the Ivor Novello Award from the British Performing Rights Society.

He has written film scores including "The April Fools" and "A House is Not a Home." His brilliant works for the theater include "Promises, Promises," which received a Grammy Award and a Tony Award nomination.

Hal has been an inspiring advocate for young songwriters as well. He is a member of the board of directors of ASCAP and formerly served as its

President. He is also chairman of the board of the National Academy of Popular Music.

It is worth pointing out, as we debate immigration reform, that Hal wrote the song, "America Is," which was the official song of the Liberty Centennial campaign for the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

Many of us are privileged to know Hal personally. He is a remarkable artist and an outstanding humanitarian. Hal wrote the famous "What the World Needs Now is Love," and in so many ways, Hal has always expanded that love with his magnificent songs that have enriched all of our lives. I congratulate him on this special birthday, and I wish him many more beautiful years. As my mother would have said, "Tell that nice young Hal David not to worry about turning 85—he won't slow down for another 10 or 15 years." May the raindrops keep falling on your head, Hal, and keep nourishing your special genius.●

RECOGNITION OF AN OUTSTANDING MASSACHUSETTS CORPORATION

● Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I am honored to recognize iRobot Corporation, an outstanding Massachusetts company that develops cutting edge technology, and to congratulate the board, management team and staff on the quality products they provide to our armed services.

Minimizing troop casualties is an endless task for both our civilian and military leaders, and I am proud to represent a State that hosts some of the country's leading thinkers in addressing that challenge. I had the pleasure of visiting such a company recently and I was deeply impressed by the commitment and perseverance of the people at iRobot.

Founded in 1990 by three roboticists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—Helen Greiner, Colin Angle and Rodney Brooks—iRobot designs behavior-based, artificially intelligent robots. These robots are built to perform dangerous duties that would otherwise risk the lives of our soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their economic impact on our state is considerable. As a homegrown Massachusetts business, iRobot brings in millions of dollars in revenue to the State's economy, and it is the only publicly traded company dedicated solely to this emerging industry.

I recently had the opportunity to see firsthand an extraordinary piece of equipment developed by iRobot—the PackBot Tactical Mobile Robot. The PackBot is a lightweight robot designed to disarm IEDs. There are currently more than 300 PackBot robots deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world. Since mobilization, PackBot robots have performed thousands of missions and in the process saved countless soldiers' lives.

I applaud iRobot's efforts to develop 21st century technology to help our

troops accomplish their missions, and I am very proud that such an exemplary company calls Massachusetts home.●

CONGRATULATING THE STUDENTS OF EAST BRUNSWICK HIGH SCHOOL

● Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate the students of East Brunswick High School in New Jersey for winning the 2006 "We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution" competition. The breadth of knowledge displayed about our government should serve as an inspiration to all Americans.

The road to the national championship was not an easy one. The students spent months researching different constitutional topics, ranging from the philosophical underpinnings of the Constitution to issues currently being debated on the Senate floor. Participants then participated in mock congressional hearings where they were questioned by state judges, professors, lawyers, and journalists.

East Brunswick first won the New Jersey state competition to earn the right to participate in the national finals here in Washington, DC. In three days of intense competition, the students competed against more than 1,500 other students from every State and the District of Columbia. This is East Brunswick's third consecutive win in this prestigious competition.

I would like to congratulate each member of the East Brunswick High School team: Brian Boyarksy, David Chu, Nelson Chu, Dana Covit, Megan DeMarco, Ben DeMarzo, Craig Distel, Deborah Elson, Dana Feuchtbaum, Munira Gunja, Melinda Guo, Shelby Highstein, Evan Hoffman, Jayasree Iyer, Ryan Korn, Michael Martelo, Carol Ann Moccio, Jeffrey Myers, Ari Ne'eman, Daniel Nowicki, Aditya Panda, Sherwin Salar, Gil Shefer, Aaron Sin, Lauren Slater, Eric Smith, Merichelle Villapando, Amy Wang, and Jason Yang. Congratulations also to their coaches Barbara Maier and Joyce Lentz, and their teacher Alan Brodman.

I am confident the Senate will join me in wishing all the members of this team congratulations and much success in the future.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations and a withdrawal which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

At 9:33 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bills:

S. 584. An act to require the Secretary of the Interior to allow the continued occupancy and use of certain land and improvements within Rocky Mountain National Park.

H.R. 3351. An act to make technical corrections to laws relating to Native Americans, and for other purposes.

The enrolled bills were subsequently signed by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

At 12:15 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 4700. An act to provide for the conditional conveyance of any interest retained by the United States in St. Joseph Memorial Hall in St. Joseph, Michigan.

H.R. 5253. An act to prohibit price gouging in the sale of gasoline, diesel fuel, crude oil, and home heating oil, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the House has agreed to the following concurrent resolutions, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H. Con. Res. 99. Concurrent resolution expressing the need for enhanced public awareness of traumatic brain injury and support for the designation of a National Brain Injury Awareness Month.

H. Con. Res. 359. Concurrent resolution authorizing the use of the Capitol Grounds for the District of Columbia Special Olympics Law Enforcement Torch Run.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill was read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 4700. An act to provide for the conditional conveyance of any interest retained by the United States in St. Joseph Memorial Hall in St. Joseph, Michigan; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

The following concurrent resolution was read, and referred as indicated:

H. Con. Res. 99. Concurrent resolution expressing the need for enhanced public awareness of traumatic brain injury and support for the designation of a National Brain Injury Awareness Month; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bills were read the second time, and placed on the calendar:

S. 22. A bill to improve patient access to health care services and provide improved medical care by reducing the excessive burden the liability system places on the health care delivery system.

S. 23. A bill to improve women's access to health care services and provide improved medical care by reducing the excessive burden the liability system places on the delivery of obstetrical and gynecological services.