

spring to try to get consent to pass the Senate Campaign Disclosure Parity Act. Each time an objection was made on behalf of an unidentified Republican Senator. Yet no Senator had come to us to let us know what his or her objection to the bill is. The source of the objection apparently didn't want to be identified, but when the President signed the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act last week, as Senator FEINSTEIN pointed out, S. 1, fortunately, secret holds become a thing of the past, and I am very proud to have been deeply involved with passage of that legislation. So if an objection was lodged today, the objecting Senator would have had to come forward in 6 session days.

As far as I know, this was going to be the first test of the new rule on secret holds, and I was looking forward to learning who the real objector was, as the rule requires, if an objection was made on behalf of an unidentified Senator. But now it appears that the Senator from Nevada has actually identified himself as the objector to the bill, so we know what is going on here.

I believe the new provision under the new law is the reason this individual identified himself. I don't think that would have happened had it not been for the positive deterrent effect this new legislation has. Senator FEINSTEIN and I can cite this as the first time this was successfully forced in the case of a secret hold.

This underlying bill about disclosure, which I authored along with others, is completely noncontroversial. This simply put Senate campaigns under the same obligation to file their reports electronically that the House and Presidential campaigns have been forced to do for years. There is simply no reason that the information in Senate campaign finance reports should remain less accessible to the public than any other campaign finance reports. We are now at 41 bipartisan cosponsors. As the Senator from California pointed out, not a single concern about the bill was heard in the Rules Committee. The bill passed by voice vote, and no one has come to us with any concerns about it at all. So the time has come to get it done. The Senator from Nevada has made an alternative proposal to bring up the bill but to make an amendment in order. The amendment he wants to offer, however, has nothing to do with this bill. Indeed, it is a very controversial proposal to require groups that file ethics complaints to disclose their donors. I am sure the charitable and advocacy organizations will find this amendment quite controversial. It should be referred to the appropriate committee and given very searching study before it is offered on the floor. As the Senator from California said, it would certainly be a poison pill for the underlying bill, which thus far has had no public opposition whatsoever. So I am pleased the Senator from California objected. We are happy to make that objection very public.

I thank the chairman of the committee, the Senator from California. I will say again, it looks as though we made a little bit of progress. No longer is there a secret hold on the bill. Instead, the Senator from Nevada has made it plain he is the one holding up the bill by insisting on offering an unrelated amendment. That is unfortunate, but at least we know what we are dealing with. I hope in the days ahead we will be able to prevail on him to change his approach.

There are some bills where it is simply not appropriate to seek to add extraneous and controversial amendments. The amendment he has proposed is surely a poison pill for this bill, and we need to get this bill in place soon so these requirements of disclosure will apply during the 2008 election season.

Once again, I truly thank the Senator from California, and I look forward to getting this bill passed in the near future.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

The Senator from Ohio.

CHIP

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, the Children's Health Insurance Program is a sound investment. It protects our children. It fosters their development. It helps them thrive. Children without health insurance are children taken to emergency rooms instead of doctors' offices. They are children whose care is delayed and delayed, until simple sickness becomes serious illness. They are children who need our attention, our compassion, our help.

The President has said he opposes this legislation because philosophically he thinks children should be covered by private insurance, not by the Children's Health Insurance Program. It does not matter whether these children in reality should be covered by private insurance. What matters is that these children are not covered by private insurance. Simply, they are not covered at all.

By lodging a veto threat against this bill, the President is saying that if private insurers have not made room for low-income children, then we should not make room for them either. That is not just faulty logic, it is faulty ethics. At the same time, the President argues that the Children's Health Insurance Program is too expensive.

We are suggesting—bipartisanly, in both Houses, with a program that started 10 years ago, with a Democratic President, Bill Clinton, a Republican House, a Republican Senate; a bipartisan initiative from 10 years ago—we are suggesting an increase of \$7 billion a year over the next 5 years—\$35 billion.

Contrast that with the war in Iraq. Mr. President, \$7 billion a year, to cover 4 million uninsured children in this country, 75,000 in my State of Ohio—\$7 billion a year—contrast that with \$2.5 billion a week on the war in Iraq. Mr. President, \$7 billion a year; \$2.5 billion a week. Yet the President says that is too much to take care of 4 million children.

Uninsured children do not have the luxury of time. They cannot will themselves to remain healthy until individual insurance becomes more affordable or employer-sponsored coverage stops eroding or the President becomes more pragmatic. It is up to this body, this week, to take action.

In Ohio, the Demko family can tell you why they value the Children's Health Insurance Program. Emily Demko, 3 years old, has Down Syndrome. Because of her condition, she is automatically denied private health coverage because Down Syndrome is considered a preexisting condition.

Emily was covered by the Children's Health Insurance Program until March 31 of this year. Under the Children's Health Insurance Program, Emily was able to receive the therapy she needed to reach all of her developmental milestones in an age-appropriate way. But in March, Emily was cut off from this program because her father made \$113 too much per month for the family to qualify.

Her father is self-employed. Her mother stays at home to care for her. Without health insurance, the bills for Emily's care total \$3,700 per month, which, of course, is impossible for the Demkos to pay.

The Demkos' family income falls within the range of 250 and 300 percent of poverty. Emily has now been without health insurance for 6 months. Governor Strickland and the Republican legislature, bipartisanly, raised the threshold for the Children's Health Insurance Program in Ohio if the Feds go along, if the President signs our bill, to 300 percent of poverty—not for families living in the lap of luxury, but families such as the Demkos who have seen their daughter cut off from her health insurance because of a preexisting condition and falling out of eligibility because her father makes \$100 too much per month.

So far, Emily is not regressing, but there is that possibility with Down Syndrome. Her parents cannot afford the insurance for themselves either. But more than anything, they want to see 3-year-old Emily covered. They worry about what will happen to her without the therapy she needs. She does not qualify for any other programs despite her disability.

I wish President Bush would talk to the Demko family, would keep them in mind as he considers whether to sign the Children's Health Insurance Program. I hope he wants to make life better, not harder, for this hard-working family and help Emily to thrive.

The Children's Health Insurance Program will expire September 30 unless

the President signs this bill. The House and Senate have found a compromise that works for both parties. The version we passed in the Senate passed with 68 votes, more than enough to override a veto. The compromise version is very much like the Senate version, even though some of us would like to see us do a bit more.

The compromise would cover 4 million American children, as I said, 75,000 of them living in my State of Ohio. These children did not choose to be uninsured. They are not uninsured because their families walked away from private insurance. Understand, most of the children in the Children's Health Insurance Program are sons and daughters of working parents, parents who are working hard, playing by the rules, simply not making enough money to buy private insurance, and their employers are not providing that insurance.

The fact is, private insurance too often steers clear of too many working families in Akron and Toledo and Zanesville and Marion and Lima and Marietta. These families are uninsured because they have no choice. Their children have no choice. But we have a choice. We can choose to help them. Let's do it.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

NICS IMPROVEMENT ACT AND LEAHY-SCHUMER AMENDMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise to speak about H.R. 2640—it is called the NICS Improvement Act—and the Leahy-Schumer amendment.

I have worked long and hard on this bill. It has been a long time in coming. Now it is time to get it passed. To put it simply, the young man who was behind the great tragedy at Virginia Tech had a long history of mental illness but still fell through the cracks of our checking systems and bought guns and ammunition.

It is against the law for someone with serious mental illness to buy a gun. When the system fails, we are all less safe. This bill will get desperately needed resources to the States to help improve our Federal background check process. This bill will make it harder for someone to get lost in the system.

We cannot wait any longer before passing this commonsense piece of legislation. We cannot sit back and watch another Virginia Tech shooting happen without doing everything we can to stop it.

I have worked hard on this bill for more than a decade and the background check system to which it is added. In 2002, Representative CAROLYN MCCARTHY and I introduced legislation similar to what I am discussing today. It was in response to another senseless shooting. This one was at Our Lady of Peace Church, in our State, in Lynbrook, on Long Island. That was where someone with a long history of

mental illness bought a gun, walked into Our Lady of Peace Church, killed Father Lawrence Penzes and a longtime parishioner, Eileen Tosner.

So back then we introduced a bill to get money to the States to help them get important records—on mental illness, convictions, things such as that—into the NICS system. But because of the climate of mistrust on all sides of the gun issue, that bill was never passed into law. I believe it passed the House once. I believe it passed the Senate once. But the two never hooked up.

Now, here we are again. It saddens me that it has taken this long—it has been years since Our Lady of Peace; it has been 5 months since Virginia Tech—to move the debate forward and try to get something done about safety on our streets and college campuses.

Now we are so close. The House has passed similar legislation that went through with the support of both the NRA and the Brady Campaign. That does not happen too often. As you know, when the NRA and I agree on an issue, there is a good chance some good can come of it.

We already have a comprehensive background check system, but since the system relies on up-to-date computer searches to produce fast results, it is only as good as the automated information the States provide. That is why the focus of the bill is to get more records into the system. So under the bill, States that opt into the system that do well will be rewarded with grants and financial incentives. States that do not will be punished.

We have modified that so smaller States that have more difficulty keeping the records because they have smaller budgets will not be penalized. Senator LEAHY correctly insisted that be done to protect his State of Vermont. But it affects smaller States as well. The amendments Senator LEAHY has suggested and been added to this bill, I believe, improve it without getting any of our delicately balanced coalition out of kilter in any way. So I thank Senator LEAHY for doing that.

Perhaps the most important thing I can say about this bill is it is all about public safety. It is all about enforcing the laws on the books. This is not—and this is important—is not a gun control bill. No lawful gun owners are going to have their guns taken away. Nobody who should be allowed to get a gun will have his or her rights restricted.

The bill targets only those records that are supposed to be in the system already—records that demonstrate whether someone is seriously mentally ill, a felon, or so on. What Virginia Tech showed us is when the background check system fails, the consequences can be terribly tragic.

Congresswoman CAROLYN MCCARTHY and I saw that in Long Island and, of course, the Nation saw it at Virginia Tech. Nothing can bring back the 33 young people who died last April, and we do not know if we can prevent another Virginia Tech from happening,

but our bill will take a substantial step toward making the system better and keeping our streets and schools safer.

I yield the floor.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on Friday, September 21, on amendment No. 2898 to the Defense authorization bill. I have voted against similar measures in the past, and had I been available to vote on Friday, I would have again voted against this attempt to direct a precipitous withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

The terms of this amendment would have required U.S. troops to begin leaving Iraq within 90 days of the Defense authorization bill's enactment and complete that withdrawal within 9 months. While I understand public frustration with the war, I believe a precipitous and arbitrary withdrawal mandated by Congress is not a wise solution to the situation in Iraq. I cannot support attempts to set an arbitrary deadline for withdrawing our forces from Iraq, which endangers our troops, our safety at home and the overall stability of Iraq and the Middle East.

I believe our military commanders should determine how and when our troops begin leaving Iraq based on conditions on the ground. General Petraeus announced this month that he would be able to begin withdrawing U.S. forces from Iraq. I believe Congress should rely on the guidance and leadership of General Petraeus and our other commanders on the ground to determine how best to eventually bring our troops home from Iraq.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote: "The time is always ripe to do right."

This week, the time is ripe to do right by America's children.

Last Friday, my colleagues and I unveiled a strong, bicameral agreement to renew and improve the Children's Health Insurance Program.

CHIP covers kids whose parents don't qualify for Medicaid, but who cannot afford costly private insurance.

CHIP works to get health coverage to uninsured kids in America's working families.

The agreement we reached to renew CHIP will make sure that more than 6½ million children with health coverage today will keep that coverage.

The agreement we reached will make sure that millions more low-income, uninsured American children get a healthy start.

It is a good agreement. It is fiscally responsible. It has broad support across the Congress. And most importantly, it puts children first.

In August, 68 Senators voted for nearly the exact same \$35 billion agreement to renew and improve the Children's Health Insurance Program. They