

over that children of illegal immigrants will be covered by requiring that States not only verify names and Social Security numbers, but they also check citizenship information in the Social Security Administration's database. So that issue is gone.

Secondly, it ends the coverage of childless adults by the end of 1 year. So that issue is gone.

Finally, this bill concentrates on making sure the poorest kids get covered first. So that issue is gone.

This bill also helps bridge the gap for another 3.9 million children whose parents cannot afford insurance. And this program is paid for. I want to say that again. This program is paid for.

President Bush just asked us to borrow \$196 billion for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan for this year alone. But he opposes children's health insurance, even though we found a way to pay for every penny of it for the next 5 years. The \$35 billion cost for CHIP's initiatives comes solely from a 61-cent excise tax increase on cigarettes and other tobacco products. No other programs are cut. Social Security is not raided. We are not increasing the deficit. Not only will this provide millions of children with health care, experts actually estimate it is going to get 1.7 million adults to quit smoking and prevent millions of kids from ever getting hooked. So this is good for our kids' health care now, and it is going to make a lot of kids healthier in the future.

Children's health should not be about politics. I have said this over and over. It is about making sure kids see a doctor when they need to. Kids are not Democrats; they are not Republicans. They are just kids who deserve health care.

Unfortunately, President Bush has let health care for our children get caught up in a desperate attempt to appeal to his dwindling number of supporters.

We know CHIP is the right thing to do. Americans know it is the right thing to do. More than 65 percent of them oppose President Bush's veto.

So to President Bush—and to any of our colleagues out there who still see this as a debate over politics and numbers—I want to remind you once more of a little girl who is 9 years old whose name is Sydney and the millions of other kids out there who depend on us to do the right thing.

Sydney is still fighting cystic fibrosis, and her mom is still wondering whether she will be able to take care of her in the future. I hope we can tell her that we will.

So on behalf of Sydney, on behalf of the 73,000 uninsured children in my State alone, and the more than 8 million children in this country, I thank all of my colleagues who worked so hard on this bill and supported it to this point. I urge the President to stop blocking this critical program for our kids.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period for the transaction of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

PASSENGER RAIL INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, I am in support of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2007.

The passage of this critical legislation is truly a great achievement. For New Yorkers, Amtrak is not just a commodity but a life source. Passenger rail is an essential element of our transportation network that provides irreplaceable capacity and mobility to New York and the Nation. For the past near 7 years, we have had to fight the administration's constant attempts to privatize and dismantle our Nation's premier passenger rail service, Amtrak. Eliminating Amtrak service would be an economic disaster and an irresponsible policy.

Today, as gas prices continue to climb and airline delays are at an all-time high, Amtrak not only provides a necessary and affordable alternative to our congested airways, it links commuters to local locations not serviced by the airline industry. The enactment of Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2007 will end the stop-gap funding process for Amtrak and will provide the traveling public with the security of a comprehensive plan for improving our nation's passenger rail system.

No country in the world has ever developed and maintained a successful passenger railroad system without assistance from their national government. Without offering an alternative, President Bush has aimed to simply shut down passenger rail in the US.

This plan will authorize \$19.2 billion in Federal funds for Amtrak by providing \$3.2 billion over the next 6 years and will allow Amtrak to make critical repairs and improvements to its service. Funding under this legislation will allow Amtrak to implement a comprehensive plan that will enhance rail security, reduce train delays, and improve customer service. It will also provide sufficient funding and direction to bring the Northeast corridor up to a "state-of-good-repair," including vital tunnel life safety work in the Hudson River Tunnels.

In recent years, attempts by Congress to improve and modernize Amtrak's operations were stalled by the Republican-controlled House, and earlier this year the President proposed cutting \$493 million, more than 38 percent of Amtrak's operating funds. This sort of backward thinking would have severely jeopardized Amtrak's ability to serve their passenger lines in New York and throughout the Northeast.

Mr. President, in the State of New York, Amtrak operates 140 routes, employs more than 1,900 people, and has 2 of the top 10 busiest stations in their rail system. Amtrak is an integral part of our transportation infrastructure and continues to service parts of the State that need the influx of tourists, business travelers, and others. The future without Amtrak for New York would be devastating.

I am proud that the full Senate has rejected the administration's approach to Amtrak. As an original cosponsor of this legislation, I commend Senator LAUTENBERG and Senator LOTT for their leadership in steering this critically important legislation through the Senate. As an original cosponsor of this legislation, I am pleased that my Senate colleagues have voted overwhelmingly to continue to provide critical funding for Amtrak, and I look forward to this legislation being signed into law.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate made a strong and long-overdue investment in the future of public transit in Rhode Island and throughout the country. I am pleased to have cast my vote for the passage of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2007 (PRIIA), which will guide the maintenance, growth, and funding of the railroad through Fiscal Year 2012.

Each year, over 12 million business and leisure travelers depend on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service, which connects the great cities of New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. Providence is a vital link on this route, with more than half a million Amtrak passengers boarding and departing Amtrak trains in the city each year. Also on the Northeast corridor route are Kingston and Westerly, Rhode Island. Kingston is home to the University of Rhode Island, and Amtrak gives students, faculty, researchers, and visitors direct access to this thriving college town. The Westerly station provides rail service to residents of both Rhode Island and Connecticut who rely on public transportation.

Despite its importance to millions of travelers, the Northeast Corridor has fallen into a state of disrepair in recent years. The infrastructure on this route is some of the oldest in the Nation, and a revitalization plan has been necessary for some time. This new Amtrak bill includes a strategy to restore the route to good condition by September of 2012—the first capital development plan put in place since Amtrak's previous authorization expired 5 years ago—and authorizes full federal funding of necessary repairs and upgrades. The Amtrak bill also authorizes the formation of a commission to oversee the operation and maintenance of the Northeast Corridor. The commission will include Amtrak, the Federal Railroad Administration, and each state along the route. I am pleased that Rhode Island will have a voice in future planning for a resource so vital to us.

In addition to funding operations and capital improvements, the Amtrak bill also addresses the congestion experienced on so many of the system's routes. By law, Amtrak passenger trains have the right of way over private freight trains, but this preference is often ignored. The bill the Senate passed today permits the Surface Transportation Board to assess fines against non-compliant freight railroads and to distribute damages to Amtrak. Congestion has increased in recent years, especially along the Northeast Corridor, and this provision should lead to fewer and shorter delays for passengers.

Finally, let us celebrate a piece of good Rhode Island news—I have been informed that the escalators in the Providence train station, which have been broken and covered with dust since early 2005, are scheduled to be reopened and in service by the week of November 12.

I congratulate Senators FRANK LAUTENBERG of New Jersey and TRENT LOTT of Mississippi on the passage of this critical piece of legislation. I also want to recognize the contributions of Rhode Island's own Senator JACK REED, who has been a strong and constant advocate for Amtrak. The new resources and clear development plan outlined in this bill reaffirm Congress's commitment to passenger rail service in the United States.

MATTHEW SHEPARD ACT OF 2007

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I wish to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

In the early hours of October 19, 2007, a 28-year-old man was shot at allegedly because of his sexual orientation. The victim and a friend left a gay bar in Midtown Atlanta, GA, for a gas station down the street at about 3 a.m. At that time, a sport utility vehicle with three men inside pulled into the gas station's parking lot. One of the vehicle's passengers was allegedly intoxicated and complaining to customers about the number of gay people at the gas station, using antigay epithets. Some of the man's behavior is caught on surveillance tapes at the station. The victim and his friend began to walk back to the bar after a short stay at the gas station and were followed by the men in the vehicle. As they walked by the bar, the man who appeared intoxicated shot at them four or five times, grazing the victim with a bullet that had ricocheted off the building. While Georgia does not have a hate crime law, the shooting is being investigated as an antigay incident.

I believe that the Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Matthew Shepard Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

FIRES OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA 2007

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, over the past 2 weeks, residents of San Bernardino, San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, Riverside, and Santa Barbara counties in southern California have faced some of the most horrific wildland fires in California's recorded history. At one point, as many as 1 million Californians were forced from their homes and communities by flames driven by Santa Ana winds of up to 100 miles per hour.

To date, 14 people have lost their lives, almost 3,000 structures, two-thirds of them homes, have been destroyed and more than 500,000 acres have burned. Over 100 people have been injured, some seriously. The consequences to people's lives will be long term, and we will do everything we can to bring comfort to victims and regeneration to affected communities.

Throughout these fires, which are only now being subdued, thousands of firefighters, mostly Californians, but some from other States, have been on the front lines working around the clock to defeat the fires. They have been tireless and fearless. We owe these California firefighters, and those who traveled across the country, our deepest thanks and appreciation. Whether it was saving the lives of people in the path of the flames, or making a stand to protect a neighborhood or a whole town, these brave men and women were there selflessly doing their duty. CalFire, the California National Guard, county and local fire agencies worked tirelessly to get the job done.

Thankfully, there has been no loss of firefighter lives, though several of our firefighters were injured, and to them I send my best wishes for a full recovery.

I hope that today we all can recognize our firefighters' valor and steadfastness in the face of the threat. We must also commit ourselves to standing up for their health and welfare as they face health challenges that sometimes last a lifetime. They do a very difficult job and we must do everything possible to assure they have all the support necessary so that they can continue to be there when the next threat presents itself.

SOMALIA

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I have come to this floor many times over the years to urge increased U.S. attention and resources to Somalia. Meanwhile, the United States and the international community at large have continued to respond sporadically and

clumsily to the steady deterioration of Somalia's security, humanitarian, and political situations. In January, I said that we had only a very limited window to establish the conditions necessary for stability in Somalia and the volatile Horn of Africa region, but I fear that opportunity may soon be lost. Events over the past few days suggest that strong but inclusive leadership is needed now if Somalia is to avoid the worst descent into chaos of its tumultuous history.

This weekend saw a massive setback in Somalia's security and humanitarian situation as a fresh outbreak of fighting which aid workers describe as the worst violence in months—forced tens of thousands more Somalis from their homes in Mogadishu. Most of these people are seeking refuge in communities whose coping capacities are already at the breaking point due to the strain of providing food, water, protection, shelter, and basic services to more than 300,000 existing internally displaced persons. Some of the newly displaced have fled to areas where there is little or no access by humanitarian agencies.

Forty of these aid organizations that are operating against all odds in Somalia released a statement yesterday highlighting the dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian situation and their increasing inability to effectively respond due to security and access constraints. They are calling on the international community and all parties to the present conflict to demonstrate a commitment to protect civilians, to facilitate the delivery of aid, and to respect humanitarian space and the safety of humanitarian workers. I want to take this moment to honor the courageous individuals and their sponsoring organizations for their persistent service to the innocent civilians most affected by the ongoing instability in Somalia and to echo their appeal for concerted action to support their work and the broader objective of peace for Somalia.

Amidst this dark backdrop there is a glimmer of hope for progress. On Monday, the embattled Foreign Minister of Somalia's fragile transitional federal government, Ali Mohamed Gedi, resigned amid feverish political infighting. Since its formation 3 years ago, the TFG has suffered from a lack of public legitimacy due to its inability to effectively represent and provide security and services to the Somali people. The appointment of a new Prime Minister is likely to be the last chance for this transitional government to restore some credibility and move forward with political reconciliation. I encourage all parties to seize this opportunity for progress towards a solution to the country's deepening crisis.

In January, I warned that without concerted international and national action, Somalia could deteriorate into what it has been since the early 1990s—a haven for terrorists and warlords and a source of crippling instability in a