

In the meantime, health insurers have been living large, their profits increasing by more than a third over the last 5 years—not much different from the oil industry, where the public recoils from staggeringly high gas prices, and the oil industry is making record high profits. The public—particularly small business—is recoiling from higher health insurance premiums and higher copays and deductibles. Yet health insurance companies are doing better and better.

Middle-class families are shouldering the burden of skyrocketing gas prices and ballooning food prices, even as the equity in their homes erodes and the cost of putting their children through college explodes.

It would be ideal if they could afford to pay a king's ransom for health insurance. They cannot. And they should not have to.

With those realities staring us in the face, inaction from this body is the same as indifference.

My legislation attacks the issue of health coverage access from several different directions.

To ensure widespread access, the bill would establish a national insurance pool modeled after the successful Federal Employees Health Benefits program. The FEHB, Federal Employees Health Benefits program, which enables enrollees to choose from a variety of health plans, with rates and benefits negotiated by the Federal Office of Personnel Management, has served Members of Congress and hundreds of thousands of Federal employees well for many years now.

So understand, there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Federal employees—whether they work in the Celebrezze Building in Cleveland, whether they work in the Office of Management and Budget in Washington, whether they work in Bethesda for the National Institutes of Health, whether they work at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base; any of these Federal jobs—Federal employees are in a huge pool that negotiates price. So it obviously works in a way that keeps rates in check.

Under my bill, an independent contractor would manage a program that looks like FEHB, with a few modifications to accommodate the market segment it would serve. A few of those modifications are designed to hold down costs.

The bill would establish a reinsurance program to pay claims that fall between \$5,000 and \$75,000. That is where small business gets hit the hardest. When 1 or 2 or 3 employees, in a company of 50 or 40 or 30 or 100, get hit with a huge bill of hundreds of thousands of dollars, it affects the entire pool, and it affects everyone's premium and, in many cases, it makes insurance for the small business employer simply out of reach.

This bill establishes a reinsurance program to pay claims that fall between \$5,000 and \$75,000. This approach

minimizes premium spikes and it makes coverage affordable for companies regardless of the age and the health of their employees.

The bill establishes what is called a loss-ratio standard for insurers. This means that insurers would be required to spend most of their premium income on claims, and hold down their administrative costs. We know what happens with small employers: the administrative costs the insurance companies take are typically huge and have a major impact on the per-employee cost of health insurance.

The bill would identify and apply strategies to ensure that providers employ "best practices" in health care, which means they are providing the right care at the right time in the right amount.

Finally, the bill would target price gouging by drug manufacturers and manufacturers of other medical products, including medical devices.

Price gouging occurs in U.S. health care when a company exploits American consumers by charging them dramatically higher prices than consumers in other wealthy nations.

Why are we paying so much more for prescription drugs in this country than the Canadians pay, when the Canadians often are buying drugs manufactured in the United States? It is the same drug, same brand name, same packaging, same dosage. Yet they are paying in Canada sometimes half as much.

In fact, for years, I used to take—when I was in the House of Representatives—busloads of constituents to Canada, about 2, 2½ hours away from Lorain, OH, where I lived, to buy prescription drugs at a pharmacy in Ontario. The same drug, same dosage—everything was the same, except for the price.

Other modifications in the bill are designed to ensure that health coverage is nondiscriminatory. Think about it this way: If your next-door neighbor develops a mental illness such as clinical depression, and you develop a medical illness such as heart disease, why should your next-door neighbor be denied health benefits that you get because that is a mental illness versus a physical illness? We both have paid premiums. Your next-door neighbor and you have both paid premiums to cover your health care costs. You both need health care. Why is one condition—the condition of heart disease—more worthy of coverage than the condition of clinical depression?

My bill charges a group representing providers, businesses, consumers, economists, and health policy experts with rethinking health care coverage to eliminate arbitrary differences in the coverage of equally disruptive, disabling, or dangerous health conditions.

The bottom line is this: We have an opportunity to expand access to health coverage in a way that achieves fundamental goals.

One, we reach populations who cannot find a home in the current insur-

ance system because they are small businesses, typically, or self employed.

We stand up for American consumers who are paying absolutely ridiculous prices in many cases for essential health care.

We demand spending discipline on the part of insurers. They have chosen to play a pivotal role in the health of our Nation. They can live with reasonable limits on their administrative costs, as their profits go up and their executive salaries are in the stratosphere.

We can clean up duplication and random variation in the delivery of health care services.

We can end arbitrary coverage rules that turn health protection into a health care crapshoot.

For the sake of small employers, for the sake of their employees, for the sake of self-employed entrepreneurs—whom we need so desperately in this country to compete globally—and for the sake of every American who did not request, did not sign up for a particular health problem, and should not be penalized for having it, I hope Members on both sides of the aisle will support my legislation.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

“MISSION ACCOMPLISHED” ANNIVERSARY

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, 5 years ago today, President Bush stood on the deck of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* in front of a banner that said “Mission Accomplished” and he told the Nation that major combat operations ended in Iraq. Those were his words. Now, listening to the radio reports today, I hear that the President's Press Secretary, Dana Perino, said we all—all of America—misunderstood. He didn't really mean the mission in Iraq was accomplished; he was just talking about the fact that the particular aircraft carrier on which he landed, that they had done their mission and that was accomplished.

I don't even know how to react to that. It is beneath the dignity of a White House Press Secretary to reach in that fashion. I will tell you why. I read the speech the President made in its entirety, and I don't see one thing that talks about a mission accomplished by the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, the carrier—not one word, not one thing.

I thought to myself: What would that be like? I thought: Maybe it is as if the Presiding Officer or I were giving a speech on health care, and behind us

we had a big banner and the speech was televised and it said: Health care for all. Health care for all. We gave a speech, and then a few days later someone who saw the speech said: Senator, I am really annoyed about your speech. You said health care for all. I already have my health care. I don't like your system. Leave me out of it.

And I responded in this way: I didn't mean anyone outside this room. I only meant the people I was speaking to in the room—even though I had a sign that said: Health Care For All.

So please, please, let's not make matters worse by distorting the truth any more than it has already been distorted from day one of this national nightmare.

What else did the President say on that aircraft carrier that day 5 years ago today? He said: Other nations in history have fought in foreign lands and remain to occupy and exploit. Americans following a battle—

Listen:

Americans following a battle want nothing more than to return home. Americans following a battle want nothing more than to return home.

He said:

That is your direction tonight.

Five years ago, the President said we won the battle; it is time to go home. Where are we 5 years later? I just heard 48 deaths last month, which is the highest in 6 months. Since that day 5 years ago, 3,922 troops have died in Iraq, including 796 either from or based in California, and almost 30,000 have been wounded. We have spent more than a half billion dollars, and there is no end in sight.

When the President made his declaration, the price of oil was \$26 per barrel. It now stands at \$113 per barrel. Remember, the oil was supposed to pay for the war. Remember. Don't forget, the oil was supposed to pay for the war. That is what the administration told us.

The words, "Mission Accomplished," no matter how somebody tries to torture it, have come to symbolize the dishonesty and the incompetence that took our Nation into an ill-advised war of choice—a war with a price in terms of lives and treasure and our Nation's standing in the world only grows higher and higher and higher with each passing day. We cannot afford it.

We recognize the words, "Mission Accomplished," as part of a sad and familiar pattern, another verse in the same song from the people who warned us the smoking gun could be a mushroom cloud. Remember when Secretary Rice said the smoking gun could be a mushroom cloud, even as they knew it wasn't true. They assured us we would be greeted as liberators. They swore we would be turning the corner and that the insurgency was in its last throes.

Then they said, when we asked why isn't this war over: Well, we need to train enough Iraqis, and when they stand up, we will stand down. We have spent so much training the Iraqis—I

want to make sure I am right on this—\$20 billion we have spent training over 400,000 Iraqis.

I asked General Petraeus: How many al-Qaida are there?

He said: Very few left, a few thousand maybe—not even.

I asked General Petraeus: How many insurgents are there?

He said: In the thousands.

We have trained over 400,000 Iraqi soldiers, but our troops are still dying instead of playing a support role as they should.

I wish to talk about the money that we, the taxpayers, are spending. We are spending \$10 billion a month in Iraq. That is \$2.5 billion a week. That is \$357 million a day. Now, remember, this is all borrowed money and the cost of this is going right to the debt that our grandchildren and their children will have on their backs. The President's policy is being paid for on a credit card, and we are sticking future generations with the bill. That is irresponsible and immoral.

We don't have a plan to get out of Iraq 5 years after "Mission Accomplished." Everybody says this war cannot be won through military means; it has to be won through political means. Yet we sit back, and the Government in Iraq makes very little progress, and they know, because of this President and this administration, they don't have a price to pay for not being effective. They don't pay a price for that, for not solving this politically. They don't pay any price because we are going to be there, and the blood and treasure of this country is on the line.

The President says: Iran and al-Qaida are our biggest enemies. The President of Iraq holds hands with Ahmadinejad of Iran. They kiss each other on the cheek. We spend this money, we lose these lives, our President says Iran is our biggest enemy alongside al-Qaida, and we just keep on sending the money to a government that embraces Iran.

Now, I don't care how you figure this out, it doesn't add up to me. For less than the cost of 3 months in Iraq, we could enroll every eligible child in the Nation in the Head Start Program for a year. For 3 months in Iraq, that is what we could do for our children, and we know the waiting list is long.

For 2 weeks in Iraq we could provide health insurance for 6 million uninsured children for a whole year. The list goes on.

For 7 days in Iraq we could enroll 2.5 million kids in afterschool programs. For 6 weeks in Iraq we could ensure full interoperability of all of our communications systems. We are not protected in America because we don't give our emergency workers the interoperability they need. For the cost of 6 weeks in Iraq we could do that. Oh, no.

For 3 weeks in Iraq we could extend the renewable energy production tax credit for 4 years and see jobs from solar and wind and geothermal energy. We could extend 13 additional weeks of unemployment insurance in this reces-

sion for 1 month in Iraq. The list goes on.

We have given so much on this 5-year anniversary. It is time for a change in this country. We need to tell the Iraqis we will stand behind them, but we are not going to stand in front of them, and we are not going to continue to pay these enormous costs. Our country cannot afford it.

I thank you, and I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2007

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2881, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2881) to amend title 49, United States Code, to authorize appropriations for the Federal Aviation Administration for fiscal year 2008 through 2011, to improve aviation safety and capacity, to provide stable funding for the national aviation system, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Rockefeller amendment No. 4627, in the nature of a substitute.

Reid amendment No. 4628 (to amendment No. 4627), to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 4629 (to amendment No. 4628), of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 4630 (to the language proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 4627), to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 4631 (to amendment No. 4630), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the work done on this piece of legislation to bring it to the floor is a good piece of work. Democrats and Republicans worked together to move toward solving one of America's major problems, and that is dealing with our aviation system. Chairman ROCKEFELLER, Senator INOUE, Senator BAUCUS, Senator STEVENS, Senator GRASSLEY, Senator HUTCHISON, and their staffs understood that ensuring the safety and efficiency of America's air traffic is too important to fall victim to politics, slow walking, or obstruction. It even appeared for a while that this bill was on the path to a relatively smooth and easy final passage.

But now our Republican colleagues have signaled that they plan to let this bipartisan legislation fall victim to more obstruction. We could have moved to the bill yesterday, but the Republicans wouldn't let us do that. They forced us to spend more valuable legislative time not legislating, not trying to strengthen our country for the American people but simply overcoming procedural roadblocks that have been thrown at us time after time.