

Almost a half century later, at the end of World War II, Congress formerly recognized the pledge, but it was not yet a Senate staple, not until 10 years ago, when a New Hampshire schoolgirl wrote to Senator Bob Smith of New Hampshire and asked why the Senate did not recite the pledge every morning. She noted the House of Representatives recited it and her school did but not the Senate. Francis Bellamy would have been proud. The line he wrote to instill allegiance in schoolchildren ultimately became part of the Senate procedure at the behest of a student from New Hampshire.

We now recite the Pledge of Allegiance before any Senate business begins, and we are reminded of our common procedures and our shared loyalty, despite our often opposing outlooks politically.

The first day the pledge was recited in public schools across the country was Columbus Day in 1892. So ahead of this Columbus Day, which will fall this coming Monday, I take a brief moment to remind my fellow Senators and all those who are watching and listening to the Senate of one of our newest and proudest traditions, the salute to our flag.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for up to 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The Senator from Washington State is recognized.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I have been troubled recently by some of the claims I have heard about health insurance reform legislation that we have been working on in the Senate. When I spoke on the floor earlier this July, I said all you had to do was look at a newspaper, turn on cable news to see that the rhetoric on health insurance reform was heating up.

Unfortunately, as is often the case, the debate has not gotten any better, but it certainly has gotten louder. I know there is a lot of concern out there, and there is a lot of bad information going around.

The latest outrageous claim about reform is it would hurt America's seniors. I am here to tell our seniors and their families: That claim is false. I

wish to make this perfectly clear: We are not proposing, here in the Senate, to cut Medicare benefits or to do anything to negatively affect the health of those who are receiving Medicare.

When you hear rumors about how reform will affect seniors, consider the source. Listen to some of the inflammatory quotes. A Republican Member of the House of Representatives said: "Let me tell you here and now, it is socialized medicine."

Another Republican Congressman said: "We cannot stand idly by now as the Nation is urged to embark on an ill-conceived adventure in government medicine, the end of which no one can see, and from which the patient is certain to be the ultimate sufferer."

Those are not quotes about the current health insurance reform effort. Those statements were made in 1965, when Republicans were opposing the establishment of Medicare. Their position has not changed. Republicans have voted against Medicare almost 60 times in the last 10 years. Now, all of a sudden, Republicans are claiming Democrats support cutting Medicare benefits.

That is why last Sunday the New York Times said Republicans are: "Obscuring and twisting the facts and spreading unwarranted fear." Scoring cheap political points does not do anything at all to help Americans get affordable health insurance. Our families, and especially our seniors, deserve better.

You do not have to go back too far to find a perfect example of this Senate's history on that subject. Just last year, Democrats overcame a Republican filibuster and a veto by then-President Bush to pass the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act. That bill prevented physicians from suffering cuts in the rate at which Medicare reimburses them for providing care to seniors.

If those cuts had happened, many doctors would have been forced to stop treating patients with Medicare, severely limiting seniors' access to health care. Democrats wanted to make sure there were enough doctors to go around, and we did.

That bill also made commonsense fixes to Medicare, including requiring that Medicare cover cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation programs, lowering seniors' copayments for mental health services, and preventing cuts to vital oxygen equipment and wheelchairs.

That bill should not have been controversial. It was vetoed by President Bush. When the Senate had a chance to pass the bill over that veto, it was only the Republicans, almost 60 percent of those in the Senate, who sided with President Bush and said no to our seniors.

Actions speak louder than words. So do not be fooled when Republicans tell you Democrats do not want to protect Medicare or that health insurance reform will not be good for seniors.

The truth is, the Democratic proposal will help our seniors get the care and coverage they need and have earned. This should come as no surprise to anyone. After all, Democrats have had a long history of working to improve the health and general well-being of seniors. Democrats created Medicare over the objections of Republicans because we recognized that no American should go without health care, especially once they reach retirement age.

The American people know it has been Democrats who have been protecting Medicare for seniors since we created the program 44 years ago. Nothing has changed. Today, it is still Democrats who are fighting for better, more affordable health care for everyone, especially our seniors. Specifically, our plan moves toward closing that doughnut hole in prescription drug coverage and provides access to more affordable generic drugs. If you have Medicare, our plan makes recommended preventative services such as colonoscopies and mammograms free.

It will ensure that if you have Medicare you get a free physical every year, not just when you enroll in the program. Our plan will aggressively attack the fraud and abuse that raises Medicare costs for seniors and for all of us as taxpayers.

One thing that has been too often missing from this discussion is what will happen to Medicare if there is no reform. It is now projected that as early as 2017, if we do not make changes, the money Medicare spends on benefits and services will be greater than its income. At that point, seniors would have to pay a greater portion of their health care costs or receive fewer Medicare benefits. That is unacceptable.

Our current system is unsustainable. That is one of the reasons the non-partisan AARP supports reform this year. They know, like we do, that we must protect Medicare for our seniors over both the short term and the long term. Our plan will prevent cost increases and overpayments to insurance companies in order to keep Medicare out of the red. Now is the time to act on health care. Let me be clear. Under the Republican plan, insurance companies can dump you for preexisting conditions because you are a woman, because you are getting older, because you get sick, and Medicare will face bankruptcy.

Under our plan, if you like what you have, you keep it. If you don't we will provide affordable choices for you. We are going to protect Medicare. We will not raise taxes on the middle class, and we will not add a dime to the deficit.

Every day 14,000 more Americans lose their health insurance. That has to stop. This is not only about those who don't have coverage. The cost of treatment for the uninsured is passed on to every taxpayer. It is estimated that a family of four pays a hidden tax of

\$1,000 every year in premiums to help pay for those who don't have coverage. We will help remove that burden from all working families. We will provide stability and choice to families and businesses. We will return health care decisions back where they belong, in the hands of patients and doctors, not insurance company bureaucrats. Rumors and misinformation and scare tactics about Medicare should not prevent us from passing meaningful health insurance reform legislation this year.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

THE DEMOCRATIC PLAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the latest trillion-dollar, 1,000-page Democrat plan raises some questions—questions such as: What happens to Medicare?

Tens of millions of American seniors want to know.

Here is what we can say for sure.

The Democrat plan is a trillion-dollar experiment that cuts Medicare, raises taxes, and threatens the health care choices that millions of Americans now enjoy.

We know the Democrat plan will make massive cuts to Medicare—\$500 billion worth—to fund more government spending.

We know Medicare Advantage benefits will be slashed almost in half, causing many of the 11 million seniors enrolled in it to lose benefits, such as hearing aid coverage and dental care.

We know it contains nearly \$120 billion in cuts to hospitals that care for seniors, more than \$40 billion from home health agencies, and nearly \$8 billion from hospices.

And we know this: Medicare is already on the path to bankruptcy. Yet instead of trying to fix it, the Democrat plan is to use it as a piggy bank to pay for new government-run health care programs.

Republicans have tried to protect Medicare throughout this debate. Our amendments to do so were rejected in committee. We proposed an amendment to prevent cuts to skilled nursing facilities, long-term care hospitals, inpatient rehabilitation, hospice care and home health care. They rejected it. We offered an amendment to strike cuts that wouldn't improve Medicare. They rejected it. We offered an amendment to eliminate an unaccountable commission that would have the power to decide payments to Medicare providers. They rejected it. This isn't reform, and America's seniors know it.

Americans are demanding that their voices are heard in this debate. They want their questions answered, particularly when it comes to Medicare. They don't want the status quo. But

they don't want what Democrats are pushing either: a trillion-dollar experiment that cuts Medicare, raises taxes, limits choices, and makes health care more expensive. Americans have questions. They are not getting the answers they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, will the minority leader yield for a question?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I say to my friend from Illinois, I have an appointment in my office. I am happy to yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. I was going to ask the minority leader for the Republican plan for health care reform. Unfortunately, there is not a Republican plan for health care reform. What we have is a litany of criticism, a litany of complaint. That is what we have received during the course of this debate.

Senator MAX BAUCUS, chairman of the Finance Committee, took three of the most likely Republicans—Senators GRASSLEY, ENZI, and SNOWE—sat with them literally for months saying: Let's do this on a bipartisan basis. Meanwhile, the rest of us were a little frustrated, if not upset. We wanted to get moving, get into the debate. Let's get into this. It is a big issue. Health care reform is important. But Senator BAUCUS said: I have to try everything I can to make this a bipartisan effort. And he did. He spent months at it, day after day after day. What does he have to show for it? In the end, two of the Republican Senators walked out saying: We are not interested. The other said: I will wait and see.

So when they come to the floor critical of this debate on health care reform, the obvious question I would ask the Republican leader is: What is your plan? The status quo? You want to continue health care as we have it in America today? Do you want to try to defend what is happening to the cost of health care?

I was with a businessman from Chicago last week, a good, conscientious businessman, a young man, a principled man who has made money in his life but understands that he owes at least the people around him and his employees to give back. He said: Do you know what is going to happen to health insurance premiums for my employees? They go up 18 percent in 1 year, 18 percent. He said: I don't know if I can keep doing this. Guess what? His situation is being repeated over and over again. Businesses across America are dropping health care coverage for their employees because they can't afford it. The cost is out of hand.

Did we hear one word from the Republican leader about dealing with this cost escalation? No. The Republicans have no plan to deal with this. We are trying. It isn't easy. This is one-sixth of the economy. I love it when Senators come to the floor and call this a \$1 trillion experiment. Let's put it in

perspective. A trillion dollars is an enormous, almost unimaginable sum of money. But what will the cost of America's health care system be, for all of our health care, over the next 10 years? It will be \$35 trillion. So \$1 trillion in reform over 10 years represents less than 3 percent of the amount we are going to already be spending if we don't change the health care system and make it better. One trillion out of thirty-five million dollars? In perspective, we understand that if we are going to bring about real reform, we do have to invest in it.

Where will the trillion dollars go? The trillion dollars will go to help businesses with tax breaks to pay for health insurance for their employees. It will go to lower income working families so they can afford to buy health insurance. That is where the money will go.

Ultimately, do you know where it goes? It means that more and more Americans have health insurance coverage. Today, this day, and every day in America, 14,000 people will lose health insurance coverage. Imagine waking up this morning, heading off to work and learning during the course of the day that you have lost your job. It is happening. But you are not only losing your job, you are losing your health insurance. You go home at night and say to your spouse: Bad news. I just got the pink slip. I will be laid off in 2 weeks. But even worse news, our sick child with diabetes is no longer going to have health insurance coverage.

That is the reality for 14,000 families a day. When I hear the Republican leader criticize our effort to expand coverage of health insurance to the millions of Americans who are unprotected, to slow down this cancellation of health insurance for 14,000 Americans a day, my obvious question to him is: What is your alternative? What do you want to do? The answer is, nothing. Nothing except criticize.

There is nothing wrong with being critical. That is what this Chamber is all about. Ideas are up for debate. People will disagree. They will come up with their own point of view. That is good. A good healthy debate is what our government is about, what our Nation is about, and what can generate in the end a solution to our problems. But when I hear some of the things that have just been said: a 1,000-page bill. Does that bring you up short? Can't breathe? Your heart skips a beat, 1,000 pages? What if I told you this bill is addressing our health care system which consumes \$1 out of every \$6 in the American economy? One sixth of our gross domestic product deals with health care. Would it take 1,000 pages to address this in a responsible way? I am surprised it didn't take more. And how are we going to measure a bill in terms of its value? That bill is just too long. It is 1,000 pages long. I am sorry, maybe God got it right with the Ten Commandments and their brevity, but