

In my judgment, it is a one-way ticket to a single-payer, government-run health care system, one that will compromise patient access to quality care.

It is impossible for private industry to compete with the government. The government can fix the prices and pick the rules that make only one plan feasible—the government plan. When the government acts as both the player and the umpire, it's not a level playing field. That close call at the plate will never go to the runner and the foul ball magically will become a home run.

Some will say the government-run option will increase competition and keep the private insurers honest. Left unsaid is that government underpayments on Medicaid and Medicare are creating enormous cost shifting and increase the health care costs for others. Underpayments for Medicare and Medicaid are estimated to shift about \$89 billion onto people who have private insurance. Each family pays an additional \$1,800 annually to make up for the government's flawed payment system. Hospitals and doctors literally told me they could not keep their businesses open on the Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rate. So the creation of another plan, a government plan, will only rob from Peter to pay Paul. Eventually, there will be no private insurance companies left to bear the burden.

Bottom line is that government does not balance the books, and it views itself as not having to. Washington seems happy to keep on printing money and raising taxes. How can private business compete with that?

If a government-run public plan was truly going to compete, it would face the same regulations and the same risks that the private industry feels. No bailouts if it becomes insolvent. Does anyone think the bill's proponents would honestly let that happen? The Administration would probably claim it is too big to fail, like AIG, Citibank, General Motors.

A system with a competitive government option, I fear, is a fairy tale. A government-run plan will undercut the private market and ultimately drive them out of business. I am not defending the private insurance industry. Far from it. But we need to be honest with the American people. An uneven playing field is not right, and it will not benefit Americans.

The effect, I fear, will be longer waiting lines, less innovation, and rationing of care. In Canada, the average wait time for radiation treatment is 7 weeks. I cannot imagine asking Americans diagnosed with cancer to wait that long. There are some in Washington who have their heels dug in on a single-payer plan. It contradicts the President's promise. He has said over and over that people will be able to keep their health care. But Americans beware. One study estimates 119 million people will shift to the government plan. They will not choose that; their employer will choose it for them.

We cannot fault employers that are trying to save money.

In the committee draft, businesses that employ 25 or more employees would be required to pay an annual penalty of \$750 per employee. When you do the math, this is no penalty compared to the cost of private insurance.

In 2008, the average employer's cost for an individual health care plan was \$3,900. Putting their employees on the public plan option would save them over \$3,200 a year for each employee. So you can see why this shift would occur.

Ultimately, people will not have a choice. Their employer will make the choice, and they will be forced onto the government plan. To promise otherwise is misleading. Even the President has recognized that shift is going to occur.

I conclude my comments today by saying: Don't be fooled. A government plan that does not compete on a level playing field means people will migrate to the government plan, and the choice to keep private insurance will not be a viable option.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

MASTER SERGEANT BRENDAN O'CONNOR

Mr. BURR. Madam President, one of the privileges of being a Senator is that we have the opportunity to meet extraordinary people every day. Whether you are the Senator from Illinois or the Senator from Nebraska, extraordinary people walk through your door every day of the week. But sometimes we get to meet amazing individuals whom we can honestly call heroes, who lay their lives on the line for their country and sacrifice themselves for our freedom.

MSG Brendan O'Connor, a medic in the 7th Special Forces Group, is one of those very special people. In June of 2006, Master Sergeant O'Connor was deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. His group was stationed near Kandahar and charged with a variety of things, including security, training of the Afghan Army, and counterterrorism operations against a ruthless enemy.

We have all heard news reports and heard of suicide bombers driving cars loaded with explosives into markets and crowded areas killing innocent men, women, and children. We have all heard accounts of suicide bombers strapping explosives to their waists and walking through a market, intentionally killing individuals. All of these individuals have been branded as religious zealots willing to die for their cause. However, that is not always the case. Oftentimes, these Taliban warlords recruit suicide bombers in other ways. They go into small villages and they hold whole families hostage. They instruct the young men in the family that if they do not carry out a suicide mission, they are going to kill the rest of the family, or if they do, they will let them live.

Brendan's team was tracking one of these Taliban warlords, one of these thugs, outside of Kandahar, who was notorious for this type of "recruitment." They tracked the terrorist to a small farming village surrounded by vineyards and orchards. Once in the area, Brendan's team set up a perimeter and defensive position to root out these warlords. They arrived late one evening and, working under the cloak of darkness, proceeded to sweep the village, hoping to surprise the local Taliban leader. However, their arrival was tipped off to the Taliban, and they had fled just minutes before U.S. soldiers arrived.

Having found evidence of the Taliban's existence, the soldiers knew it was only a matter of time before they engaged the enemy. That first skirmish started the next day at dusk. Brendan's team, about 70 soldiers comprised of 8 U.S. special ops and 60 Afghan soldiers, took some small arms and rocket propelled grenade fire, but it didn't last long. The Taliban attacked the U.S.-led forces several more times over the next day and night but never amounting to much. U.S.-led forces didn't even sustain a single injury during those firefights.

After having arrived on Wednesday evening and sporadically fighting the Taliban for 2 days, Brendan's team decided it was time to take the fight to the enemy. On that Saturday, MSG Tom Maholluck led a small recon group to a Taliban stronghold, which was just outside the village in a cluster of farm buildings. The team was comprised of four special forces operators and a dozen Afghan Army. Sergeant Maholluck was able to get in close enough to the compound without being detected. Once he assessed the situation, Sergeant Maholluck thought he could take the compound with a simple recon team. He ordered two of his soldiers—SSG Matt Binnie and SSG Joe Feurst—to take a fire suppression position and cover Sergeant Maholluck and the remaining Afghan Army contingency while they stormed the compound.

When the U.S.-led recon team launched its first attack on the Taliban compound, they were quickly greeted with heavy machine gunfire. The first fire expression team returned fire; however, the machine gun nest had a tactical advantage over the fire team—they had the higher ground. Matt was struck first by a bullet that grazed his neck and stunned him for a moment. Matt regained his senses, and he and Joe returned fire, as much as they could, but the Taliban had them pinned down. Then an RPG round came and struck Staff Sergeant Feurst directly in the leg. It didn't explode, thankfully, but badly wounded SSG Joe Feurst. As Staff Sergeant Binnie was tending to Joe's leg, he was shot through the shoulder. The only thing left of the fire suppression team was a young Afghan interpreter who had stayed with them. Master Sergeant

Maholluck was cut off from Staff Sergeant Binnie and Staff Sergeant Feurst, so he radioed for help.

Back at the main perimeter, Brendan O'Connor got the call and put a team together to go get his wounded soldiers. When Brendan's team got to the area, the Taliban had taken positions along the route to the wounded soldiers, leaving Brendan only one path—an exposed field. Brendan instructed his team to take up positions to support the wounded and started on his mission to save the lives of these soldiers.

At first, Brendan started crawling through an open field with his gear on. He quickly realized this wasn't going to work. So under a hail of small arms, RPG, and machine gun fire, Brendan removed all his armor and crawled through an open field to get to the two wounded. Brendan couldn't locate the two soldiers by sight, only by calling out. And as he heard them, he would get closer and closer.

When he arrived at the two wounded, he had to make a quick decision about Joe's injuries, which were life threatening. Brendan quickly got Staff Sergeant Binnie taken care of and instructed him to crawl through a culvert to get to safety. Staff Sergeant Feurst wasn't so easy. He was unconscious and unable to move. Brendan pulled him down as far as he could into the culvert. He started to drag him, but he realized he couldn't drag him the entire way.

As if the actions of Brendan and his team weren't heroic enough at this point, the next part of this account will send chills down your spine.

At this time during the fight, it was estimated that nearly 300 Taliban fighters had engaged the approximately 15-member U.S. force. I say approximately because several Afghan Army members who originally accompanied Brendan's team had fled by this point. As Brendan's natural cover was coming to an end, he pulled Joe on to his shoulder, and he ran across an area while 300 Taliban fighters were shooting at him. God was watching Brendan that day. God saw one man risk his life to save another, and he saw fit to keep Brendan from harm as he carried a wounded U.S. soldier to safety. Unfortunately, Joe Feurst died soon after Brendan got him back due to massive blood loss. SSG Matt Binnie survived because of Brendan's leadership and courage under fire.

The battle that had gone on for nearly 3 days was coming to an end at this point. U.S. forces had air support, which escorted them out of the area. All told, the U.S.-led force killed 125 Taliban fighters and only lost 2 of their own, with 1 wounded. They weren't able to capture or kill the warlord that time; however, due to the losses to the Taliban that day in that strike, U.S. forces got him several weeks later.

For their heroics in combat, MSG Tom Maholluck and SSG Matt Binnie were awarded the Silver Star. SSG Joe

Feurst was awarded the Bronze Star. Brendan O'Connor was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his valor. It was the first time a member of the 7th Special Forces Group had been awarded the medal since 1964.

It is an honor to have Brendan and his family in Washington today. He is joined by his beautiful wife Meg and their children, Ryan, Colin, Darby, and Dillon.

It is this type of story that we rarely hear about on the nightly news, but this story was so amazing that "60 Minutes" felt compelled to do a piece on it after the soldiers arrived back home. MSG Brendan O'Connor is a person held in the highest regard by other warriors who have proudly served this country. He is a soldier who truly understands the price of freedom. The Senate salutes MSG Brendan O'Connor today.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2010

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 2892, which the clerk will state by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2892) making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2010, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

AMENDMENT NO. 1373

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Mr. REID. Madam President, I call up the amendment at the desk on behalf of Senator BYRD and Senator INOUE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nevada [Mr. REID] for Mr. BYRD and Mr. INOUE, and Mrs. MURRAY, proposes an amendment numbered 1373.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to dispense with the reading of the substitute amendment.

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

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "amendments Submitted.")

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, we now turn to the fiscal year 2010 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill. The chairman of the Homeland Security Subcommittee, Senator ROBERT C. BYRD, is home from the hospital and is improving daily and is

eager to return to the Senate as soon as he can.

He has been in regular consultations with his staff in the development of the bill that was approved by the Appropriations Committee on June 18 by a vote of 30-0. This is a bipartisan bill. I thank the ranking member on the Appropriations Committee, Senator THAD COCHRAN, and the ranking member on the subcommittee, Senator GEORGE VOINOVICH, for their cooperation in the development of the bill. I also thank the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Senator DANIEL K. INOUE, for his support.

The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security after the devastating events of September 11, 2001, was one of the most ambitious Federal reorganizations since the Department of Defense was created following World War II. Regrettably, it was the official position of the Bush administration that the Department could be created at no cost to the taxpayer. This translated into a Department with aging assets, an inability to prepare for and respond to natural disasters and future threats, and significant management and employee morale problems.

In response, Congress, on a bipartisan basis, increased homeland security spending by an average of \$2 billion per year above the President's request. These increases were invested in border security, chemical security, port security, transit security, aviation security, and cyber security. Congress also ensured State and local partners in homeland security received adequate resources to equip and train our first responders. These investments have paid off, making our Nation more secure and making us better prepared for any disaster. But we have much more work to do.

The committee-reported bill totals \$42.9 billion of discretionary budget authority, an increase of 7 percent over fiscal year 2009.

Chairman BYRD has set five major goals for the bill: No. 1, securing our borders and enforcing our immigration laws; No. 2, protecting the American people from terrorist threats and other vulnerabilities; No. 3, preparing and responding to all hazards, including natural disasters; No. 4, supporting our State, local, tribal and private sector partners in homeland security with resources and information; and finally, giving the Department the management tools it needs to succeed.

To meet these goals, the bill provides \$10.2 billion for Customs and Border Protection, including an initiative to combat drugs and violence on the Southwest border; \$5.4 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, including increased funds for the Southwest border initiative, and the Secure Communities and Criminal Alien Programs, which identify dangerous criminal aliens for deportation when they are released from prison.

It includes \$7.7 billion for the Transportation Security Administration, including a \$513 million increase for the