

“save” that money. Bear in mind, these are providers who today receive on the order of 70 percent of reimbursement from Medicare, 70 percent of what it costs them to provide the services. That is why those who buy private insurance have to pay more than 100 percent. They have to subsidize the other 30 percent or thereabouts that Medicare does not cover.

What happens when that is reduced even further, when that is cut down to 60 percent, let's say, or 50 percent? It is going to raise the premiums of everyone else who has to increase their subsidy for the government program, and it ends up reducing the care available for seniors. There are not as many doctors, the waiting lines get longer, the care that is available decreases, and we end up with rationing. That is what seniors are concerned about.

This is not a wild charge. This is not a falsity. It is in the bills. The President attempts to distract attention from it by saying we are not going to spend any money in the trust fund to pay for this. So what. There isn't any money in the trust fund.

The question is, are you going to hurt seniors' care by cutting physician and hospital payments under Medicare and eliminating the support for Medicare Advantage bills? That is what is in the two bills. That is what is going to hurt seniors.

There are a lot of arguments that do not really match up to the claims made. They set up a straw man and knock down the straw man, but still standing is the fact that the bills that are in the Congress will give the government a much greater role in our health care decisions, will increase premiums for millions of people, will result in rationing of care, and will put the government in charge of decisions with respect to treatment. All of these are concerns people expressed during the month of August and some before that need to be addressed.

Instead of simply doubling down, as some folks said, and saying: It is going to be my way or else we will call out those who disagree with us—I think we ought to listen to the American people. What I hear they have said is the following: First of all, rather than taking on a massive new spending program of close to \$1 trillion, adding several trillion to the debt over the next couple of decades, rather than increasing our debt, rather than having another government takeover following all those that have occurred so far, let's focus on the most pressing problems facing Americans, and that is putting America back to work, getting the economy going again, reducing our debt, and making sure we don't have new taxes. That is what we would like to have you focus on.

To the extent there are specific problems with health care, deal with those as well, but you can do that on a step-by-step basis in a way that targets specific solutions to specific problems.

I mentioned the problem of defensive medicine costs, over \$100 billion a year

in money we should not be spending but doctors force us to spend it, in fact, to protect themselves from this jackpot-justice system.

All right, the way to resolve that is with real medical malpractice reform. We do not need a demonstration project. I will give you a couple—Texas and Arizona. By passing modest malpractice reforms in those two States, significant progress has been made in reducing medical costs, reducing premiums, and attracting doctors. I am told that something like 7,000 doctors have moved into Texas in the last 4 years pretty much as a direct result of the more benign climate in which they can practice medicine as a result of this malpractice reform. Premiums have been cut to—I forget precisely—I think it is 21 or 23 percent.

We know what works. Let's target a specific solution to a specific problem. We don't have to worry about taking over the whole private sector system of health care delivery, putting at risk the insurance people already have that serves them well.

Finally, I note that there is some discrepancy between what the President said about his plan and the bills that are pending in Congress. My colleague, Senator CORKER, has written to the President and asked if we could get a copy of his bill because some of the things he described are not in either the House or Senate bill. At least they do not accurately describe those two bills.

I will give one example. He said:

I will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficits—either now or in the future. Period.

That is great. Unfortunately, the House and Senate bills, according to the CBO, add to the deficit: the HELP Committee in the Senate about \$750 billion worth, and in the House committee about \$239 billion worth. Clearly, these two bills are not what the President is talking about. Obviously, he has something else in mind. If he is going to be selling that to the American people, we need to see it. So I encourage the White House to send up the legislation they have so we can see what it is they are talking about that is different from these other two bills.

I said finally, but one final point. The President did not talk about how he was going to pay for it except for Medicare cuts. He did not mention the taxes on small businesses, the taxes on jobs, the taxes on employers, the penalties individuals would have to pay if they do not buy insurance as mandated here, even a tax on the chronically ill. Senator BAUCUS is proposing to limit flexible spending account contributions to \$2,000, which would raise about \$18 billion. What it would do is penalize those who have significant illnesses and would like to make larger contributions to their flexible spending accounts.

Americans have a right to be concerned about the cost of this, the way it is paid for, the effect on their health

care, and the effect on their family's future. I think we need to debate it in an honest and forthright way. I am not pulling any punches this morning, but I am hoping we can bring people together to recognize what the American people are asking for is a step-by-step approach that targets solutions to specific problems and does not try to do it in the kind of comprehensive way that results in a 1,300-page bill that, frankly, nobody will read except some staffers, and we won't know what is in it until well after the fact and which is very hard for Congress to get right.

The unintended consequences of that kind of legislation are always enormous. The costs are always far greater than anybody predicted, and the impact on the American people can be very deleterious.

So my hope is that we will listen to the American people on this, take our time to do it right, do it in a step-by-step approach, target our solutions, get away from this massive government intrusion—which is reflected in both of the bills that have been considered by the House and Senate—and, most importantly, focus first and foremost on what is most on the minds of the American people domestically; that is, the economic situation here that will be made worse if we impose new taxes on small businesses, for example. It will be made worse if we take on massive new debt. We need to focus on putting people back to work, not spending as much money, not adding to our debt, and then decide what kinds of solutions we can afford with respect to health care. If we do that, I think we will have complied with the request of our constituents, which, after all, is what we are here to do. We will have done something good for the American people, and we will not have violated that first principle of medicine, which is, of course, to first do no harm. I think the American people were pretty clear over the month of August that they wanted us to start with that proposition, and it would be a good place for us to start in the so-called health reform we are about to take up over the next several weeks.

I thank the Chair.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

SURGE THE AFGHAN ARMY

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, today we mark a solemn anniversary. Eight years ago this morning, our Nation was attacked by terrorist extremists motivated by hatred and bent on destruction. It is always appropriate to reflect on the shock of that day, the innocent lives lost, and the efforts our Nation has made since that day to ensure that Afghanistan, the nation that hosted those terrorists, cannot again become a safe haven for terrorists seeking to attack us. But today is an especially appropriate occasion to take stock of those efforts and consider how best to continue them.

I recently returned from a trip to Afghanistan where I was joined by my colleagues, Senators JACK REED and TED KAUFMAN. The situation in Afghanistan is serious. Security has deteriorated. But if we take the right steps, we can ensure Afghanistan does not revert to a Taliban-friendly government that can once again provide a safe haven for al-Qaida to terrorize us and the world.

The Obama administration's new strategy focusing on securing the Afghan population's safety and partnering with the Afghan security forces in that effort is an important start in reversing the situation in Afghanistan. The change in strategy has led our forces, in the words of General McChrystal's Counterinsurgency Guidance, to:

... live, eat and train together [with the Afghan security forces], plan and operate together, depend on one another, and hold each other accountable ... and treat them as equal partners in success.

The general's guidance goes on to say that the success of the Afghan security forces "is our goal."

To achieve that goal, we should increase and accelerate our efforts to support the Afghan security forces in their efforts to become self-sufficient in delivering security to their nation before we consider whether to increase U.S. combat forces above the levels already planned for the next few months. These steps include increasing the size of the Afghan Army and police much faster than presently planned; providing more trainers for the Afghan Army and police than presently planned; providing them with more equipment than presently planned; and working to separate local Taliban fighters from their leaders and attract them to the side of the government, as we did in Iraq.

While the security situation in Afghanistan has worsened, we still have important advantages there. The Afghan people hate the Taliban. Public opinion polls there show support for the Taliban at about 5 percent. In addition, the Afghan Army is highly motivated and its troops are proven fighters.

Despite those advantages, we face significant challenges. General McChrystal believes—and I agree—that we need to regain the initiative and create a momentum toward success. General McChrystal worries, and rightly so, about the perception that we have lost that initiative and the impact of that perception on the Afghan people, their government, al-Qaida, and the Taliban. By contrast, if we can dispel that perception, we have a chance to convince local and lower level Taliban fighters to lay down their arms and rejoin Afghan society.

I believe the most effective way to retake the initiative in Afghanistan is with a series of steps to ensure that the Afghan Army and police have the manpower, equipment, and support to secure their own nation.

First, we should increase troop levels for the Afghan Army and police faster than currently planned. There are approximately 90,000 troops in the Afghan Army now, and that number is scheduled to go up to 134,000 by October of 2010. The Afghan police are scheduled to reach a level of 82,000 by the same time. For a long time, many of us have urged the establishment of a goal of 240,000 Afghan troops and 160,000 Afghan police by 2013. The Afghan Minister of Defense has strongly supported those numbers. It now appears that our government and the Afghan Government are prepared to accept those goals. But the need for additional Afghan forces is more urgent. I believe it both possible and essential to advance those goals by a year, to 2012.

Our own military in Afghanistan has repeatedly pointed to a need for more Afghan forces. In one sector of Helmand Province we visited last week, our marines outnumbered Afghan soldiers by five to one. A marine company commander in Helmand Province told the New York Times in July that a lack of Afghan troops "is absolutely our Achilles' heel."

What do we need to do to increase the size of the Afghan Army and police? According to Afghan Defense Minister Wardak, there is no lack of Afghan manpower. We have been assured it is available. But we will need significantly more trainers. We asked General Formica, who is in charge of the American effort to train Afghan security forces, whether such an increase is possible. He indicated he would make an assessment of what would be necessary in order to meet the earlier timetable. In the meantime, we should press our NATO allies with much greater forcefulness to provide more trainers. If our NATO allies are not going to come through with the combat forces they pledged, at least they could provide additional trainers.

Larger Afghan security forces will also require more mid-level Afghan officers. In addition to supporting efforts to graduate more Afghan officers from army academies, we should consider the recommendation of Defense Minister Wardak that previous midlevel officers who fought the war against the Soviets return to service on an interim basis. Minister Wardak emphasized that those men are well qualified and well motivated. And while they may not be trained in the most current tactics, they nonetheless could temporarily meet the need of the enlarged army while the new group of officers is trained.

A larger Afghan force will need supporting infrastructure, such as barracks. While the available infrastructure may not be the most modern, it is adequate and exists in sufficient amounts.

Larger Afghan security forces will require additional equipment. There must be a major effort to transfer a significant amount of the equipment that is coming out of Iraq to the Af-

ghan Army and police. Such a significant commitment to equip the Afghan security forces would also help demonstrate U.S. determination to take the initiative and create momentum in the right direction. There is an enormous amount of equipment coming out of Iraq. Our military is calling it one of the greatest transfers of military goods in world history. A significant part of it could be transferred to the Afghan forces, increasing their capability without weakening our own readiness. Yet there does not seem to be that kind of a crash effort in place to do just that. We need to obtain, on an urgent basis, a list of the basic equipment needs of the Afghan forces and a list of how those needs could be met in a major program to transfer equipment leaving Iraq.

Rapidly expanding Afghan's military and police forces would address one of the major problems and risks we now face. General McChrystal told us he worries that waiting until 2013 for a larger Afghan force creates a gap in capabilities that brings significant risk of failure. But if we accelerate the training and equipment of Afghan forces by a year, we address his concern. Depending on additional capability from Afghanistan, rather than U.S. forces, also addresses a major problem of public perception in Afghanistan. The larger our own military footprint there, the more our enemies can seek to drive a wedge between us and the Afghan population, spreading the falsehood that we seek to dominate a Muslim nation.

Finally, we should make a concerted effort to separate the local Taliban from their leaders. In Iraq, large numbers of young Iraqis who had been attacking us switched over to our side and became the Sons of Iraq. They were drawn in part by the promise of jobs and amnesty for past attacks and in part by the recognition that the status quo was creating horrific violence in their own communities. In their own interests and the interests of their nation, they switched sides and became a positive force.

That same prospect exists in Afghanistan. Afghan leaders and our own military leaders say that local Taliban forces are motivated largely by the need for a job, loyalty to the local leader who pays them, and not by ideology or religious zeal. They believe an effort to attract these fighters to the government side could succeed if they are offered security for themselves and their families and if there is no penalty for previous activity against us.

General McChrystal himself has emphasized the potential for such reintegration to accomplish the same result as was achieved in Iraq. Here is what General McChrystal said on July 28:

Most of the fight materials we see in Afghanistan are Afghans, some with foreign cadre with them. But most we don't see are deeply ideological or even politically motivated; most are operating for pay; some are

under a commander's charismatic leadership; some are frustrated with local leaders. So I believe there is significant potential to go after what I would call mid- and low-level Taliban fighters and leaders and offer them reintegration into Afghanistan under the constitution.

But this game-changing possibility was apparently not factored into General McChrystal's assessment. There is no plan yet to put in place a Sons of Iraq approach in Afghanistan. It is urgent that we lay out the steps that need to be taken to involve local and national Afghan leaders in that effort. They alone can accomplish this crucial job, but first we and our Afghan allies must draft such a plan on an urgent basis, and the potential positive impact of such a plan should be taken into account as we consider the need for any additional U.S. military resources.

Afghanistan's people are grateful for our aid but also eager to assume responsibility for their own future. In a tiny village in Helmand Province, we were invited to meet with the village elders at their council meeting—called a shura. A group of 100 or so men sat on the floor and chatted with us about their future and their country's future. When asked how long the United States should stay, one elder said: "Until the moment that you make our security forces self-sufficient. Then you will be welcome to visit us not as soldiers but as guests."

Helping Afghanistan achieve self-sufficiency and their own security is everybody's goal. On that, there is little difference of opinion in Afghan's village councils or in the corridors of this Capitol. Can we help Afghanistan reach self-sufficiency in security fast enough? Can we get there in a way that regains the initiative and creates the momentum we need? Can we encourage those lower level Taliban to abandon an insurgency headed by terrorists whose fanaticism they do not share? I believe we can, by supporting a far more rapid growth in the Afghan Army and police, by providing more trainers more quickly, by a rapid infusion of two Afghan units of equipment no longer needed in Iraq, and by rapidly adopting a plan for the reintegration of lower level Taliban fighters into Afghan society. In other words, we need a surge of Afghan security forces. Our support of their surge will show our commitment to the success of a mission that is clearly in our national security interest, without creating a bigger U.S. military footprint that provides propaganda fodder for the Taliban.

I believe taking those steps on an urgent basis, while completing the previously planned and announced increase in U.S. combat forces, provides the best chance of success for our mission—preventing Afghanistan from again being run by a Taliban government which harbors and supports al-Qaida, whose goal is to inflict additional catastrophic attacks on the United States and the world. I believe we should implement those steps before

considering an increase in U.S. ground combat forces beyond what is already planned by the end of the year.

I yield the floor and thank the Senator from Ohio as well.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

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

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank the chairman for his leadership.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, excuse me. I thought I would have time at 10:30.

Mr. BROWN. I will speak no more than 10 minutes, so you will be free to have the floor by 10:30. I will yield the floor well before 10:30.

Mr. BOND. The Senator said 2 minutes?

Mr. BROWN. No, up to 10 minutes, I was told.

Mr. BOND. May I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended? I need 15 minutes. I ask that morning business be extended for an additional 10 minutes to accommodate my colleague from Ohio.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? The Senator from Florida is recognized.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, if the Senator would amend that to include the Senator from Florida as well?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask that the Senator from Ohio be recognized for 10 minutes, that I be recognized for 15 minutes, and that following that the Senator from Florida be recognized for 15 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, 2 nights ago the President of the United States spoke in the Chamber down the hall on the other side of the Capitol. He did what he needed to do. As I have been in the House and Senate—the House for 14 years and the Senate now for 2½—it was the best speech I had ever seen in my time, sitting and listening to the last three Presidents. Most importantly, it explained why this health care bill is so important and why it works for those who already have insurance as it builds consumer protections around those insurance policies—

no more preexisting conditions, no more cutting people's care off because they have been too expensive, no more discrimination based on gender or disability or age or geography. It explained why this legislation makes sense for people who do not have insurance, who have been without insurance or who have inadequate insurance. It really explained well why this legislation is so important to small business.

I have come to this floor almost daily when we were in session the last few months, to share stories of Ohioans. I know the Presiding Officer, as he traveled in his State, in Northern Virginia and Richmond and Roanoke, has heard these stories and gets these letters, too, showing the depth of the problem. So many people don't have health care, and so many who do have insurance have seen significant problems. They have paid their premiums month after month. Then they get very sick, they may have to take biologic drugs, they may have long hospital visits, their health care may have cost \$100,000 or \$200,000, and their insurance company simply cuts them off. How is that fair?

Let me share some of these letters today for 7 or 8 minutes and then make some comments about them.

Yvon from Wakeman in Huron County in northern Ohio writes:

My husband, a union carpenter, was out of work for 7 months straight. He just went back to work in June on a week-by-week basis.

My husband must get 130 hours of work per month to get insurance. Otherwise, we have to keep paying for COBRA, which expires at the end of the year.

It is also expensive.

In June he earned 129½ hours and we were told that because it was not the required 130 hours, we had to pay out of pocket. We offered to pay for the ½ hour and were told no, we could not.

There is no way in the world we can afford to pay for private insurance. If my husband does not have enough hours, we will have no insurance. It goes month to month like that. I am a wife, mother, sister, cousin and aunt. I want to live.

She loses her insurance and can't get her insurance out of a technicality. These things will simply not happen under this health insurance legislation we are considering over the weeks ahead, where insurance companies can deny care for a whole host of reasons, where somebody might not qualify for health insurance. Yvon and her husband will be able to go in the health care exchange. They will be able to get into private care. They can get insurance, if they choose, from Aetna or BlueCross. They can work with their union plan that her husband apparently has as a carpenter or they can go into public option. She would have those choices.

Bob from Cleveland has been an owner of a steel processing firm since 1990 and has had to grapple with deteriorating health benefits over the last 5 years. His firm employs 30 employees, 20 of whom depend on the company's depreciating health care coverage