

problem that could affect the quality of health care, the quality of future doctors, and not only teaching hospitals as educational institutions but also because they take on the toughest cases. These are the academic and research hospitals which try to institute new procedures to deal with disease and try to find ways to cure people in imaginative ways. We don't want to in any way quell their enthusiasm and idealism. Unfortunately, these Medicare cuts are going to do just that.

I might also add that these teaching hospitals in my State account for 59 percent of charity care. In other words, the poorest of the poor who have no health insurance, who are not covered by Medicaid, who may be working poor, for example, come into these hospitals. They are taken care of free of charge.

If the Senator from Oklahoma thinks we can just walk away from this, make a 1-percent cut and go home and accept that as the verdict of history, I think he is wrong. I think, frankly, whether you are in Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Nebraska, or Illinois, these hospitals are in trouble. Rural hospitals are in trouble, as well.

These hospitals have seen dramatic cutbacks in reimbursement. In my part of the world, these hospitals are a lifeline for farmers who are injured in their farming operations or in traffic accidents. These small hospitals keep people alive. If we turn our backs on them and say that because we are enmeshed in some theoretical budgetary debate we can ignore what is happening to these hospitals, we are making a serious mistake. Some of the hospitals may close, some will merge, some will be bought out, some may keep the sign on the door that you have seen for years, but what is going on inside the hospital is going to change. It is going to change for the worse instead of the better.

When we consider sense-of-the-Senate resolutions that try to strike some position of principle—and I respect the Senator from Oklahoma for his point of view—I say: Let's get down to the real world.

Let's be honest with the American people in the closing days of this budget debate. And I sincerely hope we are in the closing days of this debate. Let's tell them what is going on here.

We are no longer awash in red ink as we have been for 20 years. We are starting to move toward a surplus. The economy is strong. We feel good about that. We would borrow less from Social Security this year, if it is held to \$5 billion, than probably any year in recent memory, and all of it will be paid back with the interest. We would use it to meet emergency needs of America—such as the farm crisis the Senators from Iowa and Nebraska have shown such leadership on—and we would be responsive to these crises at a time when what is at stake is, frankly, a

major part of our economy and a major part of America.

Second, we would address the health care needs of this country. If we think we can go home and beat our chests about how pure we were in the budgetary process and don't lift a finger to help these hospitals that are struggling to survive, we will have made a very serious mistake.

I salute the Senator from Iowa and other colleagues, such as Senator BOXER of California and Senator MURRAY of Washington, who have tried to make sure this Labor-HHS bill does not lay off 29,000 teachers at the end of this school year. This bill would do it. The bill that some Republican Senators are so proud of would lay off 29,000 teachers across America because of cuts that are made in that bill and 1,200 teachers in my home State of Illinois.

Is that how we want to welcome the new century? Is that how we want to tell our kids we are going to greet a new generation, by laying off teachers and increasing class size? No.

There are important priorities for us to face. I sincerely hope before we get caught up in some theoretical debate, as Senator HARKIN has said, about whether the horse is out of the barn, that we talk about whether or not we are going to protect Americans in their homes and protect them in their communities.

I support Senator HARKIN's remarks. I support—maybe one of the few times—Gov. George W. Bush, who has reminded his congressional Republicans to keep their feet on the ground and to realize there are real people out there who, frankly, are going to be injured and damaged and their lives changed if congressional Republicans have their way in this budgetary process. Governor Bush is on the right track. We will stay tuned to see if he stays there.

I sincerely hope before we leave and before we think we have completed our responsibility that we will pass a budget we can explain to American families is in their best interests.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon I voted against Senator HUTCHINSON's amendment to transfer \$25 million from the budget of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to increase funding for community health centers. I am not opposed to expanding the services provided by community health centers—to the contrary, I believe they are an important element in health care delivery in West Virginia.

However, Mr. President, the National Labor Relations Board is also important to West Virginia. During the first half of this century, labor conditions in West Virginia coal mines, and the resulting growth in unions, led to a virtual state of war, in some instances. Having an orderly process in place to

resolve these kinds of issues, such as that managed by the NLRB, helps to keep management-labor-union relations on a civilized path.

The National Labor Relations Board is an independent agency created by Congress to administer the National Labor Relations Act, which is the primary law governing the relationship between unions and employers in the private sector. The NLRB has two principal functions: first, to determine, through secret ballot elections, if employees want to be represented by a union in dealing with their employers; and second, to prevent and remedy unfair labor practices by either employers or unions. The NLRB investigates violations of the National Labor Relations Act, seeks voluntary remedies to violations, and adjudicates those businesses that refuse to comply with the Act.

Opponents of the NLRB have been eager to eliminate it in recent years, but have not had much success in doing so on the merits. Instead, they have been attacking its financing. The NLRB's budget has not kept pace with inflation over the last six years, and, even though the case load has decreased since last year, overall, staffing levels have fallen at a greater rate. The NLRB had 6,198 unfair labor practice cases pending initial investigation at the end of Fiscal Year 1998. The Hutchinson amendment, according to the NLRB, would have caused them to process six thousand fewer cases, and cut all staff training and information technology activities in Fiscal Year 2000.

I support community health centers. They provide a vital service to low income persons who cannot afford health insurance. However, in my opinion, it is not practical to underfund one valuable program in order to fund another. Rather, I would prefer to see the funds come from other sources less disruptive to agencies as valuable to our nations' laborers as the NLRB.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VOINOVICH). The Senator from Georgia.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

FINALLY FIX SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. KERREY. Mr. President, I heard an exchange earlier between the Senator from Iowa and the Senator from Oklahoma who talked about raiding the Social Security trust fund. We have not been raiding the Social Security trust fund for the last 16 years. What we have—since 1983—is a tax that generates revenue in excess of what we