

should send their mushers to Montana to train. After all, it is warmer. But we usually have plenty of snow. And the sun even shines.

Despite this loss, Senators STEVENS, MURKOWSKI and the people of Alaska can be justly proud of the rich tradition and sporting heritage of the Iditarod and their home State.

THE LADY GRIZ OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, on a related subject, this is a great week for Montana sports enthusiasts. First, Doug Swingley won the Iditarod Dog Sled Race, and tomorrow night the Lady Griz of the University of Montana will be playing in the opening round of the NCAA's Women's Final Four Tournament being held in San Diego.

I have been watching the Lady Griz's trek to March madness. At the beginning of the season, we all had high hopes for them. But they have far surpassed what many of us expected of them—and believe me—we Montanans have high expectations for our sports teams.

This group of tough Montana and Pacific Northwest women have shown that they have the grit and the discipline to be national champions.

Just last weekend, I saw them win their final Big Sky season game against their cross-State archrivals, the Montana State University Lady-Bobcats. It was a great game, I sat down in the front row, right next to the floor, I enjoyed very much. Both teams played very well.

And now that the Lady Griz have prevailed and won the Big Sky title, all Montanans join together in wishing their coach Robin Selvig the best of luck as they represent Montana at the NCAA tournament. Robin has built a great program that stresses hard work, excellent academics and discipline—all Montana values that we treasure.

With the tough inside play of Jodi Hinrichs and the outside shooting skills of Kristy Langton and Skyla Sisco, teams from all over the country will be facing a tough challenge from the Big Sky State. Win or lose, we are all very proud of them. And we look forward to seeing them in the final four and hopefully as national champions.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

MORRELL RETIREES

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, last month, Republicans in the House of Representatives marked the first 50 days of their efforts to pass the Contract With America. Notably missing from their speeches was any mention of progress in the fight to enact health reform.

Indeed, this issue was not even mentioned in the House Contract With America, nor was health reform among the priority bills introduced by Repub-

licans in either the House or Senate leadership.

Meanwhile, in this first 100 days, another group of citizens in my home State was learning, personally and painfully, why we need to continue the fight for health reform.

The 3,300 retirees of John Morrell & Co., a South Dakota meat packing firm, learned this January that the firm was ending all retiree health coverage.

Many of these retirees and their families had worked for Morrell all of their adult lives.

On January 24, Morrell retirees received a simple, yet unexpected, letter stating that their health insurance plan was being terminated, effective midnight, January 31, 1995—only a week later.

The benefits being terminated, the letter said, included all hospital, major medical, and prescription drug coverage, Medicare supplemental insurance, vision care, and life insurance coverage.

For those retirees under 65, this action poses a particular problem. While Morrell gave them the option of paying for their own coverage for up to 1 year, few can afford the \$500 monthly premium for a couple. And many cannot purchase coverage at any price, because of preexisting conditions like diabetes or heart disease.

Medicare beneficiaries would have to buy expensive supplemental insurance on their own.

Morrell's decision was all the more painful to the retirees because it was so unexpected. These retirees believed they worked for a fair company; that a fair day's work resulted in a fair day's pay. They found out the hard way that the company they had helped to build had turned its back on them.

They also found out that the court system was not sympathetic to their cause: The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the company's decision. The union is now planning to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court.

Sadly, some of the retirees will not live long enough for a possible reversal.

And, if medical expenses eat up their income and assets, some Morrell retirees might be forced to resort to welfare.

All will struggle financially and emotionally to accept the change in benefits that they counted on for life.

A recent edition of the Sioux Falls Argus Leader recounted the stories of several Morrell retirees and their families.

One 26-year veteran of Morrell is legally blind, has diabetes and arthritis, takes heart medication, and wears a hearing aid. His \$300 monthly pension from Morrell will not even cover the prescription drugs he needs. He fears the financial burden of high medical costs will force him and his wife to sell their home.

Another retiree gave up \$130 from his monthly Morrell pension so his wife

could get health insurance. He now has cancer and glaucoma, and his monthly prescription costs are \$800. His wife's monthly drug costs are \$200. His monthly pension from Morrell, after 30 years service, is about \$300.

Finally, a retiree who had a kidney transplant and recently had a leg amputated, figures that he can pay for the company-offered insurance coverage for the year it is available. After that he is not sure what he will do to pay the \$1,000 monthly cost for antirejection drugs, which Medicare doesn't cover.

Mr. President, the stories go on and on.

They describe proud people who worry that high medical costs will impoverish them or force them to rely on their children for financial help.

They are stories about loyal employees who each day will live in fear of illness and injury because they have no health insurance.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated situation. What happened to Morrell workers could happen to any of the 14 million retired workers who believe they and their families have lifelong health insurance coverage through their employers.

As companies look for ways to reduce their health care costs, they will no doubt look at drastic reductions in, or outright elimination of, retiree health care benefits.

That just is not the way it should be in this country.

We all like to think that, if we work hard and play by the rules, we will be rewarded, especially in our old age.

Sadly, when it comes to our health care system, this is often not the case.

I was disappointed that the 103d Congress was unable to pass comprehensive health reform, because many of the proposals we were considering would have addressed the problem the Morrell retirees now face.

A union official recently said, "I wish that Harry and Louise could see what's happened to the people at Morrell."

I could not agree more. The problems we talked about in last year's health reform debate have not gone away simply because that session of Congress has ended.

The Morrell retiree situation is a painful reminder of that fact.

As I recently indicated in a letter to the majority leader, I remain committed to working with all of our colleagues to craft legislation that will address the serious problems of the health care system that plague American families and businesses.

I will also be offering in the next few weeks a bill that will deal directly with the problem that Morrell and other retirees face.

I hope that those who have blocked and delayed health reform will at least support the effort to ensure that our Nation's retirees get a fair day's wage from a fair day's work.