

We hope to have it at the earliest opportunity next week, if not get an agreement today.

I yield the floor. I thank the Chair.

Mr. GRAMM addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

DEMOCRATS CONTINUE TO BLOCK HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, I want to talk about this issue of naming conferees, and about the health care bill itself. I know many people think that when we have these little confrontations it is just partisanship and that it does not mean anything, but I wanted today to take a little time to talk about the real issue here and explain what it really means.

Let me begin by noting that the Senate passed a bill 44 days ago which would make health insurance permanent and portable, and which set out a procedure to try to make it easier for people to get and keep good private health insurance. It was this little bill right here.

Now, 44 days ago, the distinguished majority leader, Senator DOLE, tried to appoint conferees to work out the differences between our health care reform bill and the health care reform bill that passed the House of Representatives, so that both Houses of Congress could then bring up and pass a final bill.

For 44 days, Senator KENNEDY has objected, and for 44 days he has denied working Americans the following provisions: No 1, an 80-percent deduction for health insurance premiums that are paid by the self-employed. This is a provision which is contained in the bill that we passed thanks to an amendment that was written and offered by Senator DOLE; No 2, the deductibility of long-term health insurance premiums; No 3, the ability of people with terminal illnesses, with the certification of a physician, to go ahead and collect their life insurance—a very important provision for people who have AIDS; No 4, State-sponsored high risk insurance pools—that will help low-income people who have high medical risks get health insurance in the State they reside in; and, finally, No 5, the ability to, on a penalty-free basis, draw money out of your IRA's, your individual retirement accounts, if you have high health insurance bills. These are things that have been agreed to and these are things that, with certainty, would happen if we passed this bill. But, for 44 days, the Democrats have prevented us from going to conference and working out an agreement that would let us pass this bill.

What does 80 percent deductibility of insurance premiums for the self-employed really mean? In the last year for which figures are available, there were roughly 3 million Americans who had insurance through self-employment. They were allowed a 25 percent tax deduction on the cost of that health in-

surance, even though, if they worked for somebody else, it would be 100 percent deductible. So the 3 million Americans who work for themselves had to pay 75 percent of their insurance premium with after-tax dollars because the Tax Code discriminates against the self-employed. Again, in the last year for which figures are available, the average self-employed American, in buying health insurance, got a deduction of \$713. If we had passed this bill 44 days ago when we had a chance to go to conference and work out our differences, the average American who works for himself would ultimately be able to deduct \$2,283 for the payment of private health insurance premiums. In other words, for over a month now, we have delayed over \$1,500 of savings to every self-employed worker in America.

In addition, we now have in America over \$1 trillion in individual retirement accounts or other forms of tax shelter. By allowing that money to be used to pay health insurance costs, when those costs exceed 7.5 percent of your gross adjusted income, we would be liberating \$1 trillion of assets that could be used to help working Americans at a time when not only has a rainy day arrived, but it is pouring cats and dogs as a result of exploding health insurance costs. Yet we have not passed any of these provisions because the Democrats have objected to naming conferees. Well, why do we have a filibuster of a bill that the Democrats, in huge numbers, support? Why is this happening? That is the point I want to address right now.

The Democrats say they are filibustering this bill because they are opposed to medical savings accounts. They are fearful that medical savings accounts will be in the final bill since the House of Representatives overwhelmingly adopted a provision that would permit Americans, who freely choose to set up medical savings accounts, to do so on a tax exempt basis—and they object to this.

It is very interesting to note that this objection is a rather new phenomenon. In fact, some of the objectors have, in the past, been some of the strongest proponents of medical savings accounts. Let me quote Senator DASCHLE, the Democratic leader, who introduced a bill—which contained medical savings accounts—with Senator NUNN, Senator BREAU, Senator BOREN, and others. In a statement related to that bill here is what he said: "We have introduced a bill * * * which would allow employers to provide their employees with an annual allowance in a 'medical care savings account' to pay for routine health care needs." That was his position 2 years ago.

Let me quote the Democratic leader in the House, DICK GEPHARDT, who also had a bill which contained medical savings accounts. He said, talking about medical savings accounts, "It's very popular. A lot of people like that option and I think it will be in the final

bill." That is the final health care bill. "I think it is a great option." This was DICK GEPHARDT'S position on medical savings accounts just 2 years ago.

Even the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill endorses the idea of medical savings accounts. So why the change of heart? What has happened? The Democrats say they discovered that medical savings accounts only help rich people.

Well, let me read you some quotes from some of these supposedly rich people who have medical savings accounts. This is an allegedly rich person who is the political director of the United Mine Workers in Illinois. In writing to Senator SIMON he said:

An amendment to the health care package has been offered to add a medical savings account provision. The United Mine Workers has a similar provision in our current contract that is anticipated to produce significant savings versus our previous insurance.

Let me read from another rich person who writes on behalf of medical savings accounts. This is a part-time bus driver from Danville, OH who writes:

Today I would like to appeal to President Clinton to please support the medical savings account issue. Nearly 3 years ago we went to a medical savings account plan and it has been very helpful.

Why, all of a sudden, having introduced bills that provided for medical savings accounts—why, all of a sudden, are people like Senator DASCHLE and Minority Leader GEPHARDT and other Democrats in Congress now so adamantly opposed to medical savings accounts? Let me tell you my theory as to why, all of a sudden, Democrats who have been for medical savings accounts in the past are now so adamantly opposed to them. I think that the discovery they made is not that medical savings accounts are for rich people, but rather their discovery is that medical savings accounts give people freedom. They let people choose. They empower people. Republicans are not trying to force Americans to take medical savings accounts. We just want to allow them to do make a choice without discriminating against them in the Tax Code.

Our Democratic colleagues oppose letting Americans have that choice because they do not want Americans to choose their own health care. They want Government to choose. They claim they are for this little bill, but it is actually this big stack of bills that they support.

This is what they are for. This is what we have been debating over the last 2 years—the Clinton health care bill and all of its derivatives. Our Democratic colleagues know that to let people choose their own health care means that Government cannot choose it for them. The holding up of this bill and their new-found opposition to medical savings accounts shows one thing very clearly: the Democrats do not want families to choose, they want the Government to choose.

This little bill is not the health care bill they are for—this big stack of bills

is the health care bill they are for. They really believe that they will get this big stack of health care bills someday, but only if they do not give people the freedom to choose their own health care.

So why are we being held up? Why for 44 days have we not named conferees on a bill with provisions that virtually everyone says they are for? Remember, all 100 Members of the Senate voted for it. The reason is that the Democrats do not want people to have the freedom to choose their own health care is because their real plan is not to make insurance portable and permanent and it is not one that would empower people to be efficient in buying health care through medical savings accounts. After all, that is what this bill and the House bill are trying to do. The bill the Democrats long to get back to is a bill which is represented by all of the bills that we wisely rejected last year. They want to get back to a bill where the Government, not the family, chooses.

The truly amazing thing is that Senator KENNEDY today had a press conference attacking Senator DOLE for holding up a bill that he, Senator KENNEDY, has been filibustering for 44 days. For 44 days, Senator KENNEDY has stood up and objected to naming conferees, and then today he attacks BOB DOLE for holding up an agreement?

But why has Senator KENNEDY objected? He has objected because he rejects the right of people to choose. He rejects the right of individual citizens to decide whether they want low-deductible health insurance or high-deductible health insurance. Further, he rejects the right of those who choose high-deductible health insurance to put the savings into a medical savings account which they can use to pay those deductibles tax free or which, if they do not use it for that purpose, is available to send their children to college, to make a downpayment on a new home, or to start a new business. Senator KENNEDY and the Democrats do not want people to have that right to choose, because deep down in their hearts, they want the Government to choose.

This is the health care plan they are for—it is not the health care plan that we debated this year. The Democrats know if we get medical savings accounts, if families have an incentive to be cost conscious, if families have the right to choose their own health care, that this will work, and it would mean that they never get the opportunity to have these health care purchasing collectives where Government would make the decisions.

So I simply want to remind my colleagues, when the minority leader or Senator KENNEDY stands up and objects to naming conferees, what they are really objecting to is freedom. They are really objecting to the right of people to choose—they do not want people to have a right to choose, because they want Government to choose.

That is what this debate is about. Do you want Government to run the

health care system, or do you want family choice to dominate the health care system?

To me, that is a very easy question to answer. And let me note the difference between what the Democrats are doing this year and what I did last year—just in case our colleague from Massachusetts should come over and say, “Well, here is PHIL GRAMM, he held up the Clinton health care bill in 78 days of debate.” Yes I did. It was God’s work and I expect to be remembered for it when I get to the golden gates, but I never denied it. I never stood up and said, “This is a great bill the President has proposed. These are wonderful ideas. I’m for it, but I’m just not going to let you pass it.”

I said over I am not going to let you pass this, except over my cold, dead political body. This is not what Senator KENNEDY is saying. Senator KENNEDY says he is for this bill, yet he is not allowing us to name conferees because he does not want people to be free to choose. He wants the Government to choose. This is what the debate is about—freedom—and I wanted to come over today to be sure that people understood with certainty what we are talking about. I want them to understand that the Republicans want families to choose, the Democrats want the Government to choose, and that this is about as big a difference as you can have in the world.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMAS). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

EXTRA, EXTRA—“READ ALL ABOUT IT”

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, 2 days ago, I spoke proudly of my State’s 150th birthday celebration this year and also the Smithsonian Institution’s cooperation with that effort. By the way, the Smithsonian Institution happens to be 150 years old as well this year, and they are celebrating that anniversary throughout the year. But for 2 weeks, beginning on June 26, there is going to be a celebration of my State on The Mall. Specifically, though, on June 26 there will be a birthday party for Iowa from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in the Centennial Building on The Mall across from the Smithsonian castle.

I hope that Americans will come to see, over the course of those 2 weeks, demonstrations about Iowa industry, Iowa agriculture, Iowa education, Iowa history, culture—everything—that will be on display there.

I announced that I was going to speak a little bit and shortly every day on a certain aspect of Iowa.

I want to make reference to spreading the spirit of Iowa. As I talk about the Iowa spirit, I will talk about the role of weekly and daily newspapers throughout the history of Iowa, my State.

So it is time to say, “Extra, extra—read all about it.”

Mr. President, Iowa celebrates its 150-year-old heritage this year. And at the end of this month and during the first week of July, Iowa will participate at the Festival of American Folklife on our National Mall to showcase our folks and way of life. Billing the celebration as “Iowa—Community Style,” hundreds of Iowans and Iowa natives will pitch in to spread the sesquicentennial spirit to more than a million visitors.

Of course, Iowa’s story of community wouldn’t be complete without sharing a vital and continuing chapter integral to community life in Iowa. Iowa’s first newspaper started in Dubuque when the Dubuque Visitor issued its premiere edition on May 11, 1836. And Iowa’s longest running newspaper continues to roll off the presses each day in southeast Iowa. The Burlington Hawkeye’s first edition dates back prestatehood, to July 10, 1837. To this day, the local newspaper office remains an important hub of activity on Main Street in Iowa’s 99 county seats and surrounding communities. More than 340 hometown weekly and daily newspapers currently report local events in Iowa.

As you may know, Iowa consistently ranks at the top in literacy and other tests of scholastic achievement. Perhaps it’s no small wonder that my State also holds the highest per capita number of newspapers in the country. Just take one county in Iowa, as an example. Situated on the banks of the Missouri River in northwest Iowa, Sioux County has a population of about 30,000 people and boasts no less than seven published newspapers each week. Known to be well-read, Iowans are serious about keeping abreast of current affairs in our local, national and international communities.

In fact, an international venture between Iowa media outlets and foreign journalists started 3 years ago. The International Center for Community Journalism, based in Grinnell, IA, has helped to match journalists from the Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Mongolia, and Thailand with more than 30 newspapers in Iowa. Iowa families open up their homes for 2 or 3 months while the visiting journalist works at their local newspapers.

Many times, Iowa journalists and journalism educators will reciprocate the stay in the foreign country. This exchange of information, culture, and talent has helped to spread the Iowa spirit and a vital understanding of the importance of a free press in a democratic society. The program soon will