HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss for a few moments what will, hopefully, be before the Senate before too long. Also, I will make some comments with respect to the antiarthritic drug, Lodine.

I am particularly pleased that the Senate will have a chance to vote shortly on the Kassebaum-Kennedy legislation, because breaking this political logjam on health care reform means that millions of Americans who are stuck in jobs because they have a preexisting health problem will have a new margin of health security and economic freedom.

This legislation is good for American families. It is good for our workers and our business. What it means is that fear of losing critical health insurance coverage would be a roadblock on the road to a better job and a better life. I want to applaud the bipartisan efforts of the Senate conferees, particularly Senator KENNEDY, Senator KASSEBAUM, and Senator BREAUX, who put long and hard service into this legislation, and it will be an important step forward when adopted.

Besides guaranteeing portability of health insurance coverage, this legislation contains little-noticed provisions that I think are going to make a great difference with respect to expanding health insurance coverage. This legislation, to the bipartisan credit of those Senate leaders, protects State flexibility with respect to State health insurance reforms. States like mine are laboratories for health care reform, and it is essential that we not turn out the laboratories at the State level with unnecessary Federal restrictions.

Senators KASSEBAUM and KENNEDY worked very closely with me so that the exemption language in this legislation will allow Oregon’s humane, rational, and far-reaching health insurance reforms. States like mine are laboratories for health care reform. This legislation is good for American families.

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Mr. President, there are features of this bill and provisions that were not included that I think are unfortunate. During this debate, I have expressed concern about the possibility of some vulnerable Americans being left behind if medical savings accounts become widespread. Every Senator should want to oppose the balkanization of medicine, where the young, the healthy, and the wealthy get good affordable health coverage at the expense of the sickest, the sick, and the elderly. It is inappropriate to test out the MSA concept, however, and I do believe this conference report offers a reasonable compromise in the form of a limited MSA demonstration project.

I join Senator DOMENICI and Senator WELLSTONE and many of my colleagues in mourning the loss of mental health parity in this legislation. Parity, in my view, is not just fair, it is good health care policy that saves health care dollars in the long run by assuring quality medical care for the neediest, and the elderly. It is good for our workers and our business. What it means is that fear of losing critical health insurance coverage would be a roadblock on the road to a better job and a better life. I want to applaud the bipartisan efforts of the Senate conferees, particularly Senator KENNEDY, Senator KASSEBAUM, and Senator BREAUX, who put long and hard service into this legislation, and it will be an important step forward when adopted.

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MR. PRESIDENT, I STAND.

Mr. WYDEN addressed the Chair.

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Missouri Water Raid of 1996

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, in the past 2 years, the House of Representatives has made some good decisions, but I must say they have also made some rather questionable ones that is, from the two Government shutdowns not too long ago to the attempted cuts in school lunches, Medicare, and college loans. I think it left a lot of us not only in the Senate but across the country shaking our heads. But the great water raid they pulled off under...