

seen them leaving in droves, including the States of Connecticut and my own State of Massachusetts. It has been true in the State of Maryland. There is one HMO left in the State of Maryland. Now we have 30 percent of all beneficiaries living in areas with no HMOs.

Private insurance premiums will increase 10 to 30 percent this year. This is the principal concern. In the first 4 years, 29 million senior citizen otherwise eligible under Medicare will not be able to participate in the Bush program. After that, it will be built upon the HMOs without a defined benefit package, without any indication of what the premiums, copays, or deductibles are going to be.

The alternative is a very impressive and significant downpayment in the commitment of this country to building on Medicare. I know there are many—and probably most—who are opposed to building on Medicare, who are against the Medicare system in any event. One doesn't have to be a rocket scientist to understand that. But we believe the Medicare system has worked and is working. It has to be strengthened, it has to be improved. There are many features in terms of health care that it doesn't cover. It don't cover the eye care, dental care, or foot care that it should. It doesn't do the prescription drug coverage, which is life and death. That is the major opening.

We find under the Bush plan the benefits provided are guaranteed to not be adequate. The Bush program allocates \$100 billion less to prescription drug coverage than the Gore plan over 10 years. The reason for this large gap is obvious. The Bush approach allocates too much of the surplus to tax breaks for the wealthy, and too little is left to help our senior citizens.

Under the Bush plan, the Government contributes 25 percent of the cost of prescription drug premiums—half as much as under the Gore program. In the entire history of Medicare, citizens have never been asked to pay such a high proportion of the cost of any benefit. They have never been asked to pay such a high proportion of the cost of any benefit. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated under the similar Republican plan passed by the House of Representatives, benefits would be so inadequate, costs so high, that more than half of the senior citizens who need help the most will not be able to participate. Any prescription drug benefit that leaves out more than 6 million of our senior citizens who need the protection the most is not a serious plan to help senior citizens.

Perhaps the worst aspect of the Bush plan is that it makes prescription drugs available to senior citizens only if they also accept the extreme changes in Medicare that would dramatically raise premiums for their doctors and hospital bills and coerce the most vulnerable seniors to join HMOs. That is not the kind of Medicare coverage and

it is not the kind of prescription drug benefit the American people want.

Under Bush's vision of Medicare reform, the premiums paid by senior citizens for conventional Medicare could increase by as much as 47 percent in the first year and continue to grow over time, according to the nonpartisan Medicare actuaries. The elderly would face an unacceptable choice between premiums they can afford and giving up their family doctor by joining an HMO.

Senior citizens already have the right to choose between conventional Medicare and private insurance that offers additional benefits. The difference between what seniors have today and what George W. Bush is proposing is not the difference between choice and bureaucracy, it is the difference between choice and coercion, driven by the right-wing Republican agenda to undermine Medicare by privatizing it. On this ground alone it deserves rejection. We don't have to destroy Medicare in order to save it.

There is still time this year for Congress to enact a genuine prescription drug benefit under Medicare. AL GORE and the administration have presented a strong proposal. Let's work together to enact it. The American people are waiting for our answer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

#### MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 3021

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, let me begin by stating I understand there is a bill at the desk due for its second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill to provide that a certification of the cooperation of Mexico with United States counterdrug efforts not be required for fiscal year 2001 for the limitation on assistance for Mexico under section 490 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 not to go into effect in that fiscal year.

Mr. GREGG. I object to further proceedings on this bill at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill will be placed on the calendar.

#### HEALTH CARE

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, ironically, I came to the floor to talk about some of Vice President GORE's proposals, specifically in the areas he is spending money. The fact he has created this Pyrrhic lockbox—not Pyrrhic, this mystical lockbox he is claiming for the extra surplus which has been identified under the new budget estimates, which is mystical because he has already spent the entire surplus plus whatever would occur as a result of the increased estimates on the surplus. In fact, according to the Budget Committee, he spent under the high es-

timate almost \$1 trillion more than the surplus. As a result, he is significantly invading the Social Security accounts.

But having listened to the Senator from Massachusetts, I do not believe his words can go unanswered because he has, first, made a number of statements which are inaccurate about Governor Bush's proposals on the drug plans for seniors and, second, I think he has put forward the basic premise of the debate between the two parties on the issues that should be answered. Let's begin there before I go to the specifics of the areas of his presentation, which were unfortunately numerous as they related to Governor Bush's positions. The difference here is fairly simple between the two approaches.

What was very distinctly stated by the Senator from Massachusetts is that they want to create—they use the term "universal," but a 100-percent program in the drug benefit area, which is totally managed by the Federal Government—100 percent. Vice President GORE wants to do for prescription drugs what Hillary Clinton wanted to do for health care generally. He wants to take "Hillary Care," which is essentially a nationalization of health care, and apply it to the prescription drug program.

There are a lot of problems with nationalizing the prescription drug program, with having the Federal Government take over the senior citizens' ability to buy drugs. I think most seniors understand that having the Federal Government tell them what they are going to be able to buy in drugs, exactly what type of drug program they are going to have—and it will be one size fits all for this entire country—I think most seniors have an inherent understanding, as most Americans have an inherent understanding, that that program has some significant flaws.

One of the reasons this Congress and the American people so enthusiastically rejected "Hillary Care" is that people intuitively understand that taking a program and turning it over to the Federal Government to operate, specifically when that program is critical to one's well-being, as is health care, is putting at risk one's health care, by definition.

So the Gore plan is essentially a nationalization plan. The term is used "universal, 100 percent." That means the Government runs it all. Well, 68 percent of the seniors in this country today already have a drug benefit. Many of them are fairly happy that they are able to go out and purchase a drug benefit that is tailored to what they need. There are, obviously, a lot of seniors in this country who need assistance in purchasing that drug benefit. There are a lot of seniors in this country today who do not have adequate coverage in drug benefits. The concerns of those seniors need to be addressed. But we don't address them by taking all the other senior citizens of this country who have set up their own