

not break it down into individual fragmented pieces, such as a prescription drug-only insurance policy.

There are some other concerns, such as if you were to go to a private insurance policy, you would run very strong possibilities that there would be big sections of the country that would not be covered because they have populations that are peculiarly expensive. One of those which we are already seeing in the whole body of insurance called Medicare+Choice—an HMO that insures not just prescription drugs but all of your health care needs—is almost nonexistent in rural America.

Why are they not in rural America? It is not because there are not doctors and hospitals and other facilities that can treat people in rural America. It is because the population of seniors in rural America is actuarially expensive and, therefore, an unattractive population to insure and treat.

According to a 1998 report by the Kaiser Family Foundation, rural beneficiaries are 20 percent more likely to be in fair or poor health than their urban cousins. Rural seniors are 20 percent more likely to be under 150 percent of the Federal poverty level than their urban cousins.

A study that was done in June of this year by the National Economic Council said that rural beneficiaries are 50 percent less likely to have drug coverage compared to their urban counterparts, which probably means they are less healthy because they have not had equal access to drugs. They use 10 per-

cent more prescriptions than urban seniors, and nearly 60 percent of rural beneficiaries reported not being able to purchase drugs because of their cost.

We know from our experience with Medicare+Choice that HMOs will not accept the risk of covering this urban population. What leads us to believe they are not similarly going to be left behind with this effort to have prescription drug only insurance policies? I think the answer is, unfortunately, they will be left behind.

This last issue is not really a debate about drug coverage. It is a debate, rather, about Medicare itself. Shall Medicare continue to be a universal program that is administered through the Federal Government or shall it be a program whose administration will be privatized? That is the debate.

We know there are people in this Chamber and particularly the predecessors who were here in the 1960s who thought that Medicare would fail, that it was not a sustainable system. I say quite to the contrary, Medicare has delivered on its promise of substantially increasing the health and welfare of older Americans.

That brings me to my concluding observation which is that today is a fortuitous day to be having this debate because it happens to be the anniversary of Medicare. On July 30, 1965, then-President Lyndon Johnson went to Independence, MO, the home of President Harry Truman, a man who had spent much of his political career advocating for the needs of senior

Americans and particularly access to affordable health care. So it was fitting and proper that President Johnson signed the bill at their home and then gave the first two Medicare cards to President Harry Truman and his wife Bess. That is the tradition we have had, a great tradition of service, respectful and compassionate, to America's seniors.

We would honor that tradition if tomorrow we adopt the amendment which will for the first time in its history expand a prescription drug benefit for the beneficiaries of Medicare. It is a step which will not only honor those who 37 years ago championed this program, but it will also honor those who are served by it today, our grandparents, our parents, our family, and friends who look to Medicare as the means of securing their health care. Those are the people for whom we will be voting tomorrow.

I hope my colleagues will grasp this opportunity to see that we bring Medicare into the 21st century.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 9:30 A.M.
TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, July 31, 2002.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 9:03 p.m., adjourned until Wednesday, July 31, 2002, at 9:30 a.m.