

legislation will provide such a place, and I commend the distinguished Presiding Officer for his leadership on this issue.

The mission statement contained in that report sums up the purpose of this legislation:

This museum will give voice to the centrality of the African American experience and will make it possible for all people to understand the depth, complexity, and promise of the American experience.

It is that very goal, of completing the American story of our quest for freedom and truth by publicly incorporating the experience and contribution of African Americans, that is the essence of this legislation. This museum offers the promise and the hope that all Americans can come to understand the full story of how this Nation was formed. It is past time that we publicly acknowledge and incorporate the African Americans' experience into our collective identity and this museum will provide the appropriate means for accomplishing that very goal.

Again, I congratulate my colleague, Senator BROWNBACK, and I want to specifically highlight the tremendous contribution of Representative JOHN LEWIS of Georgia, who is the lead sponsor in the House of Representatives for this bill, on their perseverance in this matter. I am honored today to join them as their lead sponsor on this side of the aisle.

I see my colleague from Mississippi, who I know has some comments he wants to make on this as well. I thank him for his leadership. As the chairman of the Rules Committee, he will have a lot to say about how this bill moves through the committee and comes to the floor.

My congratulations to the Presiding Officer from Kansas and all others who have joined with us in this collective effort this morning.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from the great State of Mississippi.

Mr. LOTT. I yield myself 5 minutes of the time reserved for the Senator from Kansas, Mr. BROWNBACK.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleagues today in cosponsoring and supporting the introduction of legislation to create the National Museum of African American History and Culture. I particularly want to commend Senator BROWNBACK, the Presiding Officer this morning, for his leadership on this issue. This legislation could not be introduced today in a way that it can be considered and acted upon without his willingness to stay behind it, to work through some of the problems that did exist and to work with the Rules Committee and our staff to make sure we had legislation that could have broad-based support and could actually be passed by the Senate.

I am pleased to see my colleague from the Rules Committee, the ranking member, Senator DODD, as a cosponsor, as well as Senator FRIST, Senator STEVENS, Senator SANTORUM, Senator SMITH, and Senator DASCHLE. Obviously, leadership on both sides of the aisle has decided to join in sponsoring this truly historic legislation.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture will be built and operated within the Smithsonian Institution and be a full-fledged Smithsonian Museum. That is a critical point to be made. It gives additional stature, credibility, and supervision that will be very helpful in the years ahead as we try to make sure this museum exhibits the way it should and is fully utilized by the American people and supported by the Congress.

I rise to express my support for the legislation because this museum will showcase not only the history and the culture of African American experience, but it will serve as a vivid display of the countless contributions that African Americans have made to the United States and in fact to the world.

Back in 2001, I had an unusual experience. It was one of those rare weekends when I stayed in Washington and my family, including my wife, were all back home in Mississippi. So I took a bicycle ride down the Mall and I wound up at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I parked my bicycle across the way kind of in the edge of the bushes and just watched people. I do not know what really started me to doing that, but I guess I was struck, as I pulled up, at the number of people there and how they were relating to this memorial. They touched it. They shed tears there. They stood there. It was obviously a moving and spiritual experience, a connecting experience, maybe an experience of closure for some people. It struck me what an important monument and memorial that site is.

Later on that same week, I was meeting with a group of African American business leaders and we ended up talking about how to properly and adequately recognize the contributions of African Americans and their role in shaping American history. I conveyed to them the story of my experience at the Vietnam Memorial and how it seemed to positively affect the people that came there, and that it caused me to recognize that every American needs a monument, a memorial, that is sort of theirs that reflects their heritage. It could be of all kinds of backgrounds in America. We have talked about the need for the Native American monument somewhere in this city to honor what they have contributed to this country. So I believe the creation of this museum will go a long way toward a similar type healing process for African Americans, and I am honored to be a part of it.

The Smithsonian is no doubt one of the world's leaders in preserving, displaying, and telling the story of the American experience. Often called the

"Nation's Attic," the Smithsonian houses the great collections of the United States and educates the public on our rich history and the importance of ensuring that knowledge passes from one generation to the next.

However, our national attic currently has some voids and we should work to fill those voids in a very careful, thoughtful, and responsible way. Having this museum is one of those voids that needs to be addressed.

Last year, a Presidential commission was appointed to study the possibility of creating a museum dedicated to African American history and culture. The commission spent thousands of hours researching the possibilities of bringing this museum to light. The commission held dozens of forums and meetings across America and received feedback from a broad spectrum of citizens and leaders within the African American and other communities. These forums and discussions were thoughtful, calculated, and complete. The feedback was resoundingly clear—a national museum is the proper vehicle for showcasing and telling the world about the African American experience. I could not agree more.

I am delighted to join in sponsoring this legislation. The history and culture of African-American life in this country is a very important part of the history of our culture and all that is America. Its story needs to be included in the sacred places in this city.

I commend Senator BROWNBACK for his leadership. I am glad to join in a bipartisan effort to get this legislation approved.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). The minority leader.

Mr. DASCHLE. Madam President, I add my voice to those of Senator LOTT and Senator DODD and others in expressing my support and commendation to the Presiding Officer for his leadership, as well as to Senator DODD and Senator LOTT, Senator SANTORUM, Senator STEVENS, and others who have taken the initiative to show such leadership on this very important project.

If I could think of one word as I consider the prospect of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, it would be "overdue." It is overdue. It is long past due. I hope on a bipartisan basis we continue to demonstrate our recognition of the remarkable contributions of African American culture and African American leadership to our country. One cannot understand the story of America without understanding the story of African Americans.

I hope we continue to work to move this project along. Again, I commend those directly involved.

#### PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mr. DASCHLE. Madam President, let me talk briefly about the important legislation addressed by the distinguished majority leader. He had spoken

about the importance of our effort this month on prescription drugs. I applaud him for making this a priority. When I was majority leader almost a year ago, we made that same commitment. Of all my disappointments, the one that perhaps may be at the top of the list last year was our inability to pass the legislation. We got 52 votes. The majority of the Senate went on record in support of the plan that was taken up by the Senate. We did not have the 60 votes because there were opponents to the legislation that made points of order that kept the Senate from accomplishing our goal of getting to conference and moving through the bill.

Let me simply list five concerns I have as we begin. Hopefully, all of the concerns can be addressed. It is critical we consider them very carefully. The first concern is procedural. The distinguished majority leader noted that we have had 29 hearings on Medicare since 1999 and, indeed, we have studied this issue a good deal. What I am concerned about now, however, is that we did not have a bill before the Senate. I know Senator GRASSLEY is working tirelessly with others to provide a vehicle to allow us the opportunity to debate this issue. The administration, of course, has come out with their recommendations that Senator DURBIN addressed a moment ago. However, we ought to have a hearing on the bill itself once it is written so we can walk through it and make sure we know exactly what we will be voting on and considering. Having that hearing on the bill seems to me to be an essential aspect of the procedural requirements we have to consider as we prepare for the debate on the Senate floor itself.

The second issue has to do with the context. Some will use Medicare and prescription drugs as a Trojan horse to privatize the Medicare system. How tragic that would be if in the name of providing good prescription drug benefits to seniors, we end up with a system that most seniors will not recognize.

Before Medicare was created in 1965, less than half of Americans over the age of 65 had health insurance. Now, 95 percent of seniors over the age 65 have health insurance. The reason they do is because of Medicare.

If we privatize Medicare, seniors in rural areas, in particular, will suffer. Let us not privatize the system. Let us not destroy a system that works so well for so many.

I find it interesting that those who laud the advantages of private-sector health care have difficulty explaining why Medicare can have such low administrative costs. Medicare's administrative costs are about 2 to 3 percent. The private sector administrative costs today are about 15 percent—5 times greater than the administrative costs of Medicare. We should think about that. I hope we are absolutely certain that in the name of prescription drugs we do not remove, we do not eliminate, we do not undermine a system that has worked so well for seniors, whether they are in urban or rural areas.

The third concern is what kind of a package we will provide. The one thing seniors tell me they need is a clear understanding of what benefits they are going to get so they can compare whatever choices they may be offered. They need to know what the benefit plan is going to be. So let's make sure we define the benefits, describe them and put them in writing, so that no one has any question what it is we are going to do.

Seniors also need to know what premium they will be asked to pay. We have to define that premium right in the bill itself.

I hope our colleagues would all share that point of view, as well. Be as transparent when it comes to benefit and premiums as we can be so that seniors know what their benefits will be and can have confidence that those benefits will be there when they're needed.

Fourth and finally, I hope, more than anything else, that we make the benefits consistent. For us to say seniors will be covered for a while, and then not covered even though they continue to pay premiums, and then covered again, would be a terrible mistake. Such coverage gaps, or sickness penalties, would lead to a deep-seated cynicism not only among seniors but among all Americans. I hope we recognize how important it is that we avoid any coverage gaps by including defined benefits and defined premiums.

That is, in essence, what we are hoping we can achieve. As we draft the bill, let's simply do this: Let's make sure we have hearings so we know what is in it. Make sure that, in the name of prescription drugs, we don't privatize Medicare and dramatically change a system seniors depend on. Then let's tell seniors three things. They are going to get a defined benefit, a defined premium, and defined coverage all year with no sickness penalty. If we can agree on these principles, we can get broad bipartisan support for the bill at the end of this month.

Again, I compliment the majority leader for his determination to continue the efforts we made in the last Congress on prescription drugs. We have a chance to do it right. We have a chance to do it in a bipartisan fashion. We have a chance to ensure that at long last we make a real contribution to health care in America, for seniors in particular. That is our opportunity that awaits us as we take up the drug bill later this month.

Mr. REID. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. DASCHLE. I am happy to.

Mr. REID. I have listened to both the majority leader and you, the Democratic leader, this morning. I ask the Senator from South Dakota, the distinguished Democratic leader, if he is aware of some statements that have been made by Republican Senate leaders talking about doing away with Medicare.

Let me be more specific. Our friend, the distinguished Senator from Pennsylvania, said just 2 weeks ago:

I believe the standard benefit traditional Medicare program has to be phased out.

Is the Senator aware the distinguished Senator from Pennsylvania made that statement?

Mr. DASCHLE. The comment was made. I was not aware of it until just a few days ago. But I think it goes to the heart of what I was talking about. I appreciate the Senator from Nevada raising this question.

Unfortunately, we have a much larger question at hand, if there are those on the other side who will see this as an opportunity to privatize—to eliminate the Medicare system, as the comments of the Senator from Pennsylvania suggest. If they want to eliminate Medicare, then I think all hope of accomplishing something regarding prescription drugs will be lost. If this is a Medicare debate, if we have to back up and first defend Medicare and make sure it is protected and kept intact, then we will never have an opportunity to get to prescription drugs.

I hope the Senator from Pennsylvania would recognize the consequences of words of that magnitude. Obviously, we are prepared to have a debate about Medicare. But it will be at the expense of a debate about prescription drugs and whether we can add prescription drugs to Medicare sometime this year, hopefully this month.

Mr. REID. Will the Senator yield for another question?

Mr. DASCHLE. Yes.

Mr. REID. The distinguished Senator from Utah, Senator BENNETT, a longtime friend of this Senator, stated about 7 weeks ago:

Medicare is a disaster. We have to understand that Medicare is going to have to be overhauled. Let's create a whole new system.

Is the Senator aware our friend from Utah has made that statement?

Mr. DASCHLE. There are those on the other side—and I assume from that comment that Senator BENNETT may be among them—who believe that eliminating or dramatically altering Medicare is the only option available to us. Frankly, I am troubled by that. I think Medicare has been one of the greatest health care success stories in our Nation's history.

My mother is a beneficiary of Medicare. The remarkable consistency and the extraordinary access to health care that Medicare has provided to her and tens of millions of other seniors simply cannot be overestimated.

As I said earlier, the administrative cost for Medicare is about 3 percent. The administrative cost for private health care plans is 15 percent, 5 times greater.

Medicare provides every senior in South Dakota a chance to get health care. There are no private sector plans in large parts of South Dakota because HMO's and PPO's don't serve rural America. So from an access point of view, from an administrative point of view, from a benefit point of view, from an assurance and confidence point of view for seniors, I don't know how you could do much better than Medicare.

Can it be improved? Absolutely. Could we provide more preventive and wellness care? Absolutely. Can we provide a prescription drug benefit? Absolutely.

But when we draw down the Medicare trust fund to pay for tax cuts, we are, in essence, stealing from that very fund that will be needed in future years to provide the kind of health care that our parents, our grandparents, and our families depend upon.

The quotes from our Republican colleagues are very disconcerting and troubling. As I say, if that becomes the debate, if the debate is about the future existence of Medicare itself, we will never be able to get to a drug benefit debate.

Mr. REID. Will the Senator yield for one final question? I know there are others here wishing to speak. This will be the last question.

Mr. DASCHLE. I am happy to.

Mr. REID. The State of Nevada has two large metropolitan areas, Reno and Las Vegas, but most of the State population is in small towns—Mesquite, Ely, Hawthorne, Battle Mountain, Tonopah—places that have no managed care. If we change Medicare drastically, I don't know what will happen to the seniors in those rural communities.

I have heard the Senator today and on other occasions speak about the problems in South Dakota, which has many rural communities in it. If we do not take care of Medicare in the traditional fashion so that it is a level playing field no matter where you live, I think our Medicare Program as we have known it, that has been so successful, will leave many seniors simply without any medical care. Does the Senator agree with that statement?

Mr. DASCHLE. I couldn't agree more. In fact, what troubles me is there are those who would turn Medicare into a great big HMO. I don't know many people who are enthusiastic about the kind of care they get from their HMO. There are some good ones, I certainly would not deny that. But I must say, HMOs are not the panacea. There is not a one-size-fits-all HMO, health maintenance organization, or PPO, for that matter, preferred provider system, that would work in rural areas.

We know. We have seen from our own experience. They have tried it. They have attempted to create managed care systems in rural areas. The demographics don't work. Our health care delivery system in rural areas does not allow for a managed care system that works. Perhaps it does in Washington DC, or Los Angeles or New York.

So we cannot have a one-size-fits-all system. That is the beauty of the Medicare system. The Medicare system has adapted over the years, organizationally and administratively, to fit Alaska and South Dakota and Nevada in a way that has worked far beyond the expectations, I am sure, of many who created the system in the 1960s.

Let us not throw out a system that has worked well. Let's improve it. Let's build on it. Let's provide better benefits through it. But to privatize Medicare—to eliminate it and replace it with a new HMO in the name of Medicare—is a mistake that we will fight to the last day. That would be a real tragedy because we have an opportunity to debate how to provide a good prescription benefit. Let's agree in a bipartisan way to have that debate. This is our moment and our opportunity and I hope we seize it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. BROWNBACK. I yield myself such time as I may consume under the time I have reserved for the National Museum of African American History and Culture Museum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

#### NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I rise to join several colleagues who have already made presentations here today about the introduction of a bill for a National Museum of African American History and Culture. We currently have 48 cosponsors of this bill. I hope after today we will have a strong and clear majority sponsoring this legislation.

I want to particularly thank Senator DODD, who is the lead Democrat sponsor of this bill, and Senator LOTT, who chairs the Rules Committee through which it will go, both of whom are cosponsors of the bill, along with the majority leader and the Democratic leader who are also cosponsors of the bill, for pushing this issue, making it go forward.

I cannot go forward without recognizing Congressman JOHN LEWIS from Georgia, who has been the lead sponsor in the House, along with J.C. Watts, before he left that body, being the inspirational leader behind moving this issue forward.

Over 200 years ago, there was a dream that was America for a group of individuals who were brought to our shores in shackles, a dream so powerful it compelled a race of people to fight for the liberty of others when they were in bondage themselves, a dream that not only served as a catalyst for physical liberation in the African-American community but removed societal shackles from our culture and enabled us to realize the ideals set before us in the Constitution—that all men are created equal under God.

Today, we celebrate this magnificent history, a history of a people's quest for freedom that shaped this Nation into a symbol of freedom and democracy around the world. I am proud to stand here today with my colleagues and introduce once again to this body a bill that will create the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

I would specifically like to mention Senator DODD, Senator STEVENS, Senator LOTT, Senator SANTORUM, and the other 48 cosponsors who are pushing this museum forward.

The National Museum of African-American History and Culture Presidential Commission—signed into law by President Bush—stated that the time is now. Indeed the time is now to honor this incredible history that has shaped this great Nation.

I thank the Presidential Commission for their hard work and effort in recommending to Congress that we should build this museum, and that there is sufficient interest in the philanthropic community to financially support this museum, and that there are sufficient artifacts to fill this museum.

So many Americans will be able to share in the celebration of this museum—a uniquely American museum, one that we can celebrate. I remember when I met with the Dean of the Afro-American Studies at Howard University. He told me of a story about his grandfather who finished a bowl the day the Emancipation Proclamation was authorized. His grandfather decided to keep the bowl because it no longer was the property of a slave master but the man who made it—his grandfather.

The dean has this bowl in his home—an incredible piece of history, and I am sure there are many more pieces out there waiting for a home, a national home.

Today, we are not just introducing a bill; we are completing a piece of American history by introducing the National Museum of African-American History and Culture, which will create a museum to honor African-American contributions to this Nation—which is an extraordinary story of sacrifice and triumph.

This bill will create this museum within the Smithsonian Institution—America's premier museum complex. We have worked very hard with the Smithsonian Institution to craft a bill that will compliment their programs. And, indeed, we have done just that.

This bill is very similar to the American-Indian Museum, slated to open next year. And I know that the Smithsonian Institution will create another national treasure—one that tells the story of African-Americans in this country—a proud history, a rich history.

This bill charges the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, along with the Council of the National Museum to plan, build, and construct a museum dedicated to celebrating nationally African-American history—which is American history.

In addition, this bill charges the board of regents with choosing a site on or adjacent to the National Mall for the location of the museum.

Additionally, the bill establishes an education and program liaison section designed to work with educational institutions and museums across the