

Essentially, this provision penalizes citizens and rewards agency staff when the agency does not do its job in terms of basic investigation and information sharing regarding a project. This bill makes other significant changes to judicial review. It will force judges to reconsider preliminary injunctions every 60 days, whether or not circumstances warrant it.

In many ways, this provision could backfire on my colleagues' goal of expediting judicial review. It will force judges to engage in otherwise unnecessary proceedings, slowing their consideration of the very cases that proponents of H.R. 1904 want to fast track. Moreover, taking the courts' time to engage in this process will also divert scarce judicial resources away from other pending cases. It is also likely to encourage more lawsuits. Requiring that injunctions be renewed every 60 days, whether needed or not, gives lawyers another bite at the apple, something they often find hard to resist.

Instead of telling the courts when and how to conduct their business, we should instead be working to find a workable and effective approach to reducing wildfire risks.

This bill does not achieve that, but, with these provisions that minimize the public's input, it instead poses a real risk to the checks and balances that the American people and their independent judiciary now have on Government decisions affecting the public lands owned by the American people.

Sadly, this bill plays a bait-and-switch trick on communities threatened by wildfires. It is not fair to roll back environmental laws, public oversight, or judicial review under the guise of reacting to devastating wildfires. It will do nothing to help or to prevent the kind of devastation that southern California recently faced. It is a special interest grab-bag shrouded behind a smokescreen.

We should be offering real help and real answers, instead of allowing fear to be used as a pretext for taking the public's voice out of decisions affecting the public's lands and for ceding more power to special interests.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COCHRAN. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. COCHRAN. I understand we can proceed to adopt the conference report on a voice vote since there is no objection to that. First, I am happy to yield to the assistant majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I will not object. I simply came to the floor to congratulate the distinguished Senator from Mississippi and the Senator from Idaho for an extraordinary

job on a very difficult subject on which they have worked for years. I commend them both so much for this very important piece of legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the question is on agreeing to the conference report.

The conference report was agreed to.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. CRAPO. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION BENEFITS

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I would like to speak a few minutes about the upcoming Medicare conference report that will be before this body—I don't know when—maybe Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. Before I do so, I would like to thank and compliment many people who helped bring this legislation to this point. For many years, many of us in Congress have urged the passage of prescription drug benefits legislation for seniors. We have been close to passage many times in the last several years.

I remember last year, for example, about this time when Congress was close to adjournment. I called a meeting together in my office for one last chance—Senator KENNEDY, Senator SNOWE, myself, Senator HATCH, and other Senators who were vitally concerned about passing prescription drug legislation. We worked mightily. We worked very hard. At the very end, the talks collapsed. It didn't work, largely for political, partisan reasons, I might add, and we were not able to get a bill passed.

Here we are again. We are at the brink. We are on the verge. We are very close to getting prescription drug legislation passed. This time I very much hope that all of us—as Senators and House Members—put partisan differences aside and suspend judgment. That is, we should look at the legislation, look at the facts, and not listen to the rhetoric from various groups, to see what really makes sense.

There are a number of people I wish to thank at this time—the chairman of the committee, Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY, who has worked very hard; Senator BREAU, also a member of the committee; Senator OLYMPIA SNOWE, a member of the committee.

In addition, Congressman BILL THOMAS, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, has worked extremely dili-

gently. The Speaker of the House, the majority leader of the House, TOM DELAY; the majority leader of the Senate, BILL FRIST—there are many people who have worked very hard. I thank them very much for their efforts and for their work.

One person I also wish to thank is Senator TED KENNEDY. Senator KENNEDY worked very hard to help us pass prescription drug legislation in the Senate not too many weeks ago. He worked very hard. He worked with me. He worked with the minority leader. He worked with the majority leader. He worked with various Members of the Senate who were critical to passage of the bill.

I thank Senator KENNEDY for his yeoman's work to help pass prescription drug benefits legislation in the Senate. He also worked very hard to help get a conference report put together. He spent a good deal of time with the conferees, with myself, with the Senator from South Dakota, Mr. DASCHLE, the Senator from Tennessee, Mr. FRIST, and many other people trying to help get prescription drug legislation passed. I regret at this point that he and I have a different view of this bill. He believes there are certain flaws in this bill. I think this is a good bill and should be passed. Nevertheless, Senators should know that Senator TED KENNEDY has done a great job in helping move this legislation to the point it is today. Without his efforts, this bill would be flawed in many areas. He helped make this, in my judgment, quite a good bill.

Why should we pass prescription drug benefits legislation? I suppose the main reason is that times have changed so dramatically. In 1965, when Medicare was enacted—and it was enacted by a large vote margin—prescription drugs were not necessary. Most senior citizens were more concerned with doctors, office calls, and hospital visits for their medical concerns, rather than prescription drugs.

Look what has happened in the last 38 years since the Medicare Act passed. Prescription drugs and generic drugs are so vitally important today. They replace procedures. They help prevent the onset of disease. Often times, the medications people take tend to prevent, forestall, and delay all kinds of maladies. They are really important, much more important today and getting more important every day.

In addition, prescription drugs are becoming more expensive—much more expensive—and it is putting seniors in a bind. Many low-income seniors are in a real bind.

I worked at a pharmacy during one of my work days at home. I have worked at many different jobs in Montana. I show up at 8 o'clock in the morning with a sack lunch. I have worked in sawmills, I have waited tables. One day I was working in a pharmacy in Montana. I saw senior citizens walk up to the pharmacist in a quiet voice and ask how perhaps they could change their

medication or what prescription should they cut back on because they couldn't afford to pay for them all.

Seniors couldn't afford to pay it. It was stunning, and it was sad. It was a revelation to me. You hear about it, but when you see it, it has a real effect. It happens. Many low-income seniors are having a very difficult time trying to make ends meet. Sometimes it is a tradeoff between buying prescription drugs, buying food, and paying the rent. It happens way too frequently, and it is just not right for our country, the United States of America, to let this happen.

This legislation does a good job in remedying this situation. First of all, it is \$400 billion of prescription drug benefits for seniors spread out over 10 years—\$400 billion. That is a lot of money, but we have a lot of seniors who have great needs.

Under this legislation, seniors will find they will not have to pay all the cost of the drug but, rather, 25 percent, and the rest will be picked up by Medicare, the Federal Government, through the mechanism that is designed in this bill. They will only pay a quarter. But if you are a low-income senior, you are in a much better position under this legislation.

One-third of United States seniors are classified as low-income. A full one-third are low-income. Under this bill, low-income citizens will find that 90 percent of their benefits are covered—90 percent. That means low-income people can get the prescription drugs they need and will not have to walk up to that pharmacist and, in a hushed, quiet tone, ask what tradeoff, what drugs that person should cut back on because he or she cannot afford them.

If you are a low-income senior—and one-third of Americans are low-income. In my State, that is about 46,000 seniors who will be affected; there are about 46,000 seniors in the State of Montana who are low-income, out of about 140,000 seniors statewide. The general rule for all seniors is 75 percent of your prescription drug costs; if you are low-income, 90 percent of your prescription drugs will be paid for.

This is good legislation. We are here at a time when people in our country are asking us, Should we help our seniors or should we not?

Let me mention a couple additional reasons why I support this bill.

First of all, it helps rural America. Mr. President, there is an extra \$25 billion in this bill for rural health care. The \$400 billion I mentioned earlier all goes to benefits for seniors, either directly or indirectly. But \$25 billion extra goes for providers and \$25 billion is for rural America.

Why is that so important? It is so important because of the cost and the strain of the practice of medicine in rural America. We run the risk of not having good, adequate health care in rural parts of our country. We have all talked to many doctors and nurses who

practice in rural parts of our country. They talk about the hours. They want to serve their patients. Believe me, they want to serve their patients, but after a while there comes a time when they are just worn out.

In rural parts of America, there are often pathologists—or pulmonologists or other specialists—who have to be on call all the time or on call every second or third day. Why? Because there are fewer of them in rural America than in urban America. The costs, believe it or not, are also very high in rural America—in many cases higher than in cities. There are the transportation costs, the cost of distances, the travel costs, for patients, doctors, and suppliers.

Our State of Montana is a low-income State, unfortunately. Our per capita income in Montana is low, but we are in the middle of all the States when it comes to cost of living. We are about the bottom when it comes to family income, but we are in the middle when it comes to costs. It is because we are a rural State, and this is true for rural parts of all States.

This bill finally helps address the unlevel playing field that has existed between urban and rural America. Now rural America, finally after many years, gets its fair share.

When I first came to the Senate years ago, I realized just how hard it was for rural America to get a square deal, particularly in health care. It was stunning. Every year since I have been here, I have been working to try to get rural America a square deal compared with urban America. I was part of an organization—and I still am—called the Rural Medicare Caucus. In fact, I chaired it for a few years. Every year I am here, I have—as I know my good friend from Montana, the Presiding Officer has—worked to help to make sure that rural parts of the country are getting a fair deal. This is not rhetoric. This is real. After all of these years, finally rural America gets a fair deal.

I also support this legislation and strongly advocate for its passage because it makes sure that senior citizens, wherever they live in our country, get a universal Medicare prescription drug benefit. Now, this certainly is true in the first years after this legislation is effective, but it is also true in the future. It is also true when preferred provider organization plans are designed to come into effect. It is also true in the year 2010 when in six regions of the country, there may be demonstration projects selected to test a new system called premium support.

In all respects, all seniors in all parts of the country, in all years, will have access to the same prescription drug benefit as any other senior, in any other part of the country, in any other year. This bill does not undermine traditional Medicare fee-for-service. The drug benefit is universal and nationwide in all respects. The bill does not undermine traditional Medicare—that is, Part A and B—during the years in

which it is in effect. In a few moments I will return to this and will explain in greater detail.

This bill also very much helps address an issue that is on the minds of a lot of Senators—retiree coverage. When the bill was debated in the Senate, the prediction was that companies, States, municipalities, and nonprofit organizations might drop their retiree coverage because the bill, when passed, would provide government drug benefits to seniors. The thinking was why should companies not just go ahead and drop their retiree coverage.

Well, when the Senate took up this legislation, the CBO, which is the organization we rely upon for estimates, said that the drop rate might be about 37 percent. Since then, they have revised their numbers and they have come up with other figures. In short, if one compares apples with apples, the conference report that will soon be before this body results in a retiree drop-page rate that is about 50 percent less than the bill that passed this body by a vote of 76 to 21. Maybe it is 45 percent. Stop and think about that for a moment.

For Senators who voted for the Senate bill, they can be comforted and relieved that retiree drop-page rate is estimated by CBO to be about half of what it was in the Senate bill.

Let's focus a little bit on the retiree provisions. Essentially, companies receive about \$88 billion under this bill for their retiree benefits. The net effect is that it will discourage companies from dropping—not encourage drop-page. We all are very concerned that companies across America are beginning to cut back, and have cut back, on the number of retirees who have health care benefits or on the nature of the benefits. It is happening in America. It is happening in America as the world becomes even more competitive with global competition and as companies strive to cut down on their costs to increase their profit margins. One of the ways they can do so is cut back on employee and retiree benefits. This is happening. We know it is happening.

This legislation tends to discourage companies from cutting back. It tends to help companies keep coverage. It discourages dropping retiree coverage—it does not accelerate it. Again, it is because of the additional dollars that are going to companies. The companies still get the tax deduction for their health benefit plans. That is unchanged. In addition, under this legislation, the payments to the companies for retiree coverage are tax free. One could even say perhaps there is a little double-dipping because the assistance is tax free. This is a tremendous additional financial benefit to companies, to nonprofits, to cities, and other plans to encourage them to keep their coverage. It is a bonus. It is an incentive. This is another reason passage of this legislation is important—because it helps companies keep their retiree health plans. As a result, employers

will tend less to drop retiree coverage. They will probably tend to maintain and increase it.

There is also a myth about this bill that is there is a coverage gap on prescription drug coverage that will leave seniors out in the cold. Well, the truth about this so-called donut hole gap is the majority of seniors will never reach the spending level where they would not have coverage. Even more important, seniors who are low-income get full coverage in the benefit gap.

Of course, we wish we had more money to give a complete benefit to everyone without any donut hole, but we do not have an infinite number of dollars. We only have \$400 billion. It sounds like a lot, and it is a lot, but if we are going to give a universal drug benefit to seniors that is honest, that makes sense, that does something, not over the top but that makes sense for all seniors, it would cost a lot more than \$400 billion. We have limited ourselves to \$400 billion, and at \$400 billion there are going to be some people who will not get quite the same benefit as other people, but they will all get the benefit.

I might add that if we looked at each State, the number of seniors who have coverage for prescription drugs varies. In some States it is very high. In some States it is low. Compare that with the passage of this bill, every State gets about 96.6 percent. That is virtually 100-percent coverage. That is a big improvement.

Let's take the State of Delaware, for example. I know the Senators from Delaware know their State a lot better than I. Today, about 27 percent of seniors in Delaware have no drug coverage. Only 3.4 percent will be without coverage once this bill is enacted. Let me restate this positively; 27 percent of seniors in Delaware today do not have drug coverage. When this bill passes, virtually every Delawarean will have drug coverage.

The same is true of the State of California. Now about 21 percent of California's seniors and disabled live without prescription drug benefits. This bill will reduce this number to 5 percent. Again, most seniors, in California and in every other State, would benefit as a consequence of this legislation.

I would like to address some concerns others have raised regarding this bill. The concerns are that this legislation undermines traditional fee-for-service Medicare—that this is the beginning of undermining Medicare, the camel's nose under the tent. This is the charge.

What are the facts? The bottom line: Fee-for-service Medicare, traditional fee-for-service Medicare as we know it today, is held harmless under this bill. This is the bottom line. So if you are a senior in the United States of America you can decide that you want to keep traditional Medicare and that you do not want to join a private plan—any of the plans that may or may not exist in the future. That is, it is voluntary. A senior can either join or not join. It de-

pends on what he or she wants to do. It is an honest choice because fee-for-service traditional Medicare remain what it is today. It is held harmless. That is, the deductible doesn't change, the copay doesn't change, the benefits don't change. What exists today is what exists under this legislation. I hope Senators listen to that. I hope staffs of Senators listen to that. I hope the others who are listening, who are concerned about the bill, listen to that.

Let me explain this in greater detail. The bill finally provides a prescription drug benefit for senior citizens. We have had this opportunity many times in the past. We now have the chance to seize this opportunity. The bill also makes some changes in the general Medicare structure in terms of setting up some health care plans in the future, assuming the plans actually take shape, form, and come into existence. They don't exist today. I am referring to regional PPOs; that is, regional preferred provider organizations. They don't exist today. There are other managed care companies called HMOs in many cities. They exist in the cities primarily because they can cherry-pick counties. They can pick the counties in which they want to provide service, and if they do not want to pick one county because it is less profitable, they do not have to. If they want to serve another county because it is more profitable for them, they do. This is the way HMOs operate today. This is the system today.

This legislation says, beginning in the year 2006, our country will be divided up into various regions. Insurance companies will be allowed to offer Medicare services, including drugs, in any of the regions. The question remains, What about traditional fee-for-service? What happens to traditional fee-for-service in an area where a company sets up a plan? What if one wants to remain in traditional Medicare? The answer is, fee-for-service is held harmless. There is no change in fee-for-service.

If regional PPOs serve a region, it has to serve the entire region. It can't choose this part of this State and that part of that State. It has to serve the entire region—people in the cities, people in the rural parts of that region. Everybody has to get the same deal.

The senior living in one of these regions has a choice. The senior can stay in traditional fee-for-service Medicare or can join the plan. But fee-for-service Medicare is held harmless. There is no change to traditional Medicare.

Obviously, this does not undermine traditional Medicare as we know it. This bill builds up and strengthens Medicare. There are additional dollars here for hospitals, for doctors, for providers who will provide traditional Medicare. So this bill does not in any way undermine traditional fee for service. In fact, Medicare is held harmless under this legislation.

Some people say: That's OK, Max, we understand that, but what we are real-

ly concerned about is the so-called premium support demonstration areas. Their argument is, in those areas, traditional fee-for-service is undermined. Private plans will pull away seniors, and it will be unfair to seniors who remain in Medicare. It is the beginning of the demise of traditional fee-for-service Medicare, they argue.

That is not true. It is nonsense. Look at the facts. Look at what is in the legislation.

Let me just remind Senators that this legislation is now available for Senators to look at. Thank goodness, because when they look at it, they are going to see what is and is not included. I just ask Senators to trust me long enough to suspend judgment on it so they can go look at the legislation and make up their own minds. That is what the Senators are supposed to do—make up their own minds. I am urging Senators to suspend judgment for a little while, listen to what I am saying, because I think when they do look at the legislation, they will see that what I am saying is true. But you do not have to take it on my account. Just please do not make up your minds until you read what is actually in the legislation. You will see, even in the supposed premium support demos, and there might be up to six cities in the country, that fee-for-service Medicare is held harmless. There is no change in fee-for-service in any respect, deductibles and on—except for one. That one possible change is the Part B premium.

However, this legislation ensures that seniors who happen to live in one of the six demonstration areas can keep the same fee-for-service Medicare. If it happens that your Part B premium goes up as a result of the demonstration—it may or may not go up—but if it does, the legislation says there can be no more than a 5 percent increase on your Part B premium. This is the only possible way a senior citizen could be adversely affected in these demonstration projects.

Another point regarding these demonstrations. I have heard various figures that the demos are going to affect 10 million fee-for-service beneficiaries. We have all heard the 10 million figure. It is what some Senators suggest.

It is not true; it is untrue.

How many seniors might possibly be affected? Let's get an unbiased, objective opinion.

We asked the CBO, the Congressional Budget Office: Mr. CBO, what is the answer? How many seniors may potentially be in an area where they would be faced with a choice, stay in fee-for-service Medicare or join one of these premium support organizations? How many could be adversely affected? The answer is not 10 million. CBO says: We think it is between 670,000 and 1 million. 10 million is the figure of scare rhetoric. The actual facts are 670,000 to 1 million.

There are many other instances where there is a lot of rhetoric floating

around. But if you look at the facts, if you read the legislation that is now available, you will find it is really good legislation and all these worries and exaggerated claims about the bill are just not true.

I have a couple of additional points regarding premium support. It is a time-limited demonstration. It exists only for 6 years, starting in 2010. It would take an act of Congress to change it, an act to expand it. It cannot be extended or expanded by the Secretary or anybody else.

Fact No. 2, the demonstration will only affect limited areas of the country—up to six areas of the country only.

Fact No. 3, low-income beneficiaries are totally protected in any of these areas where premium support might occur.

Facts No. 4 and No. 5. There is no requirement for beneficiaries to enroll in the private plans. None. There is no inducement to enroll in any of these plans unless the plan happens to be a lot better than traditional fee-for-service Medicare which this bill strengthens.

How does this bill undermine traditional fee-for-service Medicare? How?

The fact is, it doesn't.

I will close by saying this is a good bill. It provides prescription drug benefits for seniors. Seniors need and deserve this help. It provides \$400 billion of help. We are not going to have this opportunity again. It is true that this bill is not perfect. But I think on the whole it is a very good. This bill is much closer to the Senate bill than it is to the House bill. It is about one-quarter away from the Senate bill. It is about three-quarters away from the House bill. Seventy-six Senators voted for the Senate bill. I think that the 76 Senators who voted for the Senate bill will find that in many respects, this bill is better than the Senate bill they supported. Additionally, when my colleagues look at the facts of this bill, they are going to find that this is pretty good legislation. It is something we should pass.

I hope people will look at the actual language and look at the facts and will support this bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Cornyn). The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I will be brief. My colleague from Oregon and I wish to mention only briefly the health bill which was passed.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, the leadership asked that I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

THE HEALTHY FORESTS BILL

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, my colleague from Oregon is on the Senate

floor. We thought for a few moments we would talk about something that just passed the Senate which we think is landmark forestry legislation. It has come in several forms over the last year and a half. But we here in the Senate call it Healthy Forests. The President calls it Healthy Forests.

The House and Senate have worked together over the last year to try to resolve an issue that the American public has seen in the form of devastating wildfires across our public land and forests for the last several years. Of course, we watched the tragedy of San Bernadino in southern California and the greater Los Angeles area just in the last month and a half that was truly devastating not only to 3,700 homes and human life but hundreds of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat and watershed.

Clearly, as chairman of the Forestry Subcommittee of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senator WYDEN and I have been working for the last several years to resolve this issue. My colleague from Oregon is the ranking member of that Forestry Subcommittee. We have known that the team effort in a bipartisan way to resolve this issue would produce a resolution. The answer is that it has.

The Senate and the House just passed a conference report that has our fingerprints all over it. Frankly, we are mighty proud of it. It moves us in the right direction of active management of these dead and dying, bug-infested, and drought-impacted forested areas that are creating phenomenal fuel loads that the American public has seen played out in wildfires across our western public land and forests for the last good number of years. It is a clear step in the right direction. It is a cautious step. We certainly do not take away the right of appeal, but we limit it.

We don't want an effort on the part of the Forest Service to do what we asked them to do to be tied up in the courts endlessly in many instances as it has been over the last several years. We also want them to be selective. We targeted most of our efforts in what we call the wildland-urban interface which will impact most of those forested areas where there is a substantial human presence in the form of homes and, obviously, communities.

At the same time, we also recognize that the problem exists elsewhere across our forested landscape. We allow that treatment of those areas with caution.

We have designated old growth definitions for protection. We have also limited it in the next decade to 20 million acres. For those critics who would suggest that this is a "ticket to log," that is purely political rhetoric to solve a political constituency problem that they have because they can't justify anymore the phenomenal loss of wildlife and watershed and habitat that we have seen over the last 4 or 5 years.

It is a cautious approach. It is certainly going to be limited in character.

Why? Because we want to prove to the American people that there is a way to manage our forests in a right and reasonable fashion; that it does not do what we did historically 40 years ago—logged by clear-cut or logged with substantial problems of erosion and watershed degradation and all of that.

This is a new day. We want to treat our forests differently. But we also understand that if we don't do something, our forestry experts have told us that we could see devastating wildfires for decades to come that will destroy the watershed, the wildlife habitat, and release huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere; and, oh, yes, by the way, destroy a very valuable resource in the form of timber that might in some areas be allowed for logging or for reasonable approaches of commercial value of the thinning and cleaning.

All of that said, we have worked hard to produce a bill. My colleague from Oregon is on the Senate floor. I will yield to him for any comments he would want to make. We have other colleagues here who I think are going to address the issue of prescription drugs and Medicare reform.

But today is an important day in the Senate in the area of forestry and forest and public land management. I am proud of the work we have done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, before he leaves the floor, I want to commend Senator CRAIG. He and I have been working with Senator FEINSTEIN in particular on this legislation in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. We have really been a triumvirate with respect to this issue.

I am so pleased to have a chance to be on the Senate floor today to speak on this conference report. This is the first forest management bill to pass both Houses in the U.S. Congress in 27 years. The fact is, the forestry legislation that is now on its way to the President of the United States will protect our communities. It will offer the first legal protection for old-growth trees, and it will create jobs.

As the distinguished Senator from Idaho, Mr. CRAIG, just noted, this legislation came together because at every stage of the process Senators said we want to get beyond the old rhetoric. We want to get beyond the polarization that has dominated this issue in the past, and we want to, in particular, take meaningful action to protect our communities.

That is what this legislation has been all about. The fires in the West, as the Senator from Idaho has known through his field hearings and other such sectors, have literally been infernos. We just felt it was critical to take steps to ensure that the rural West wouldn't be sacrificed.

I am proud today to rise in support of the conference report on H.R. 1904. This conference report is based upon the Senate-based wildfire bill compromise