

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