

On November 1, 1957, the Mighty Mac opened to traffic with the formal dedication taking place the following June. The dream of bridging the Upper and Lower Peninsula had finally become a reality.

At 552 feet above the water, the main towers of Big Mac are almost exactly as high as the Washington Monument, which stands at 555 feet. When measured by its total length of 26,372 feet, the Mackinac Bridge qualifies as the longest suspension bridge in the United States, but falls to third place behind the Golden Gate Bridge and Verrazano Narrows Bridge if only the suspended portion of the bridge is counted.

Once a year, the Big Mac opens its span to the oldest form of transportation—walking. Begun in 1958, the annual Mackinac Bridge Walk has become a Labor Day tradition for Michigan families on both peninsulas. The bridge's beautiful silhouette beckons thousands with the promise of an exhilarating 5-mile walk and spectacular views of shoreline and water from 200 feet above the Straits of Mackinac.

Over the past 50 years, the Mackinac Bridge has become an elegant landmark for our State and a source of pride for all of us. Today Michigan commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Mackinac Bridge with a celebration at Bridge View Park in St. Ignace. My heart is with all the people who are there celebrating, and I wish the rest of me were there too. Congratulations, Big Mac.

#### ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, EN BLOC HOTLINES

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I wish to share my concerns regarding the process currently being utilized by the Energy and Natural Resources Committee to pass legislation on the Senate floor. As many of my colleagues know, I am currently objecting to unanimous consent on two en bloc packages reported by the committee, containing more than 40 bills.

I want to make clear to my colleagues that I do not object to all of the bills contained in the two packages. In fact, I have offered to give consent to all those bills where I have no fiscal or policy concerns. Unfortunately, the committee is insisting on passing all of the legislation en bloc and will not allow the noncontroversial bills to be released for passage. These bills are in effect being held hostage by the committee.

As my colleagues know, I evaluate all unanimous consent requests, in part, on whether the proposed legislation increases authorizations for spending. If it does, I also look to see whether the new cost has been offset by a corresponding reduction in another program authorization. I also review each bill for specific policy concerns.

Of most concern to me, the two packages authorize over \$150 million in new spending, without a single offset. This

does not include the \$640 million reauthorization for the Geologic Mapping Program. I have offered to work with the committee to identify possible offsets that would allow the en bloc packages to move forward. Given the considerable program oversight performed by the committee, I am eager to hear where it believes other programs may not be working as intended or where they may have become of a lesser priority than the bills currently under consideration.

As stewards of the Federal tax dollar, I believe it is imperative we proceed with the hard but necessary work of prioritizing our spending. Every American taxpayer is forced to do this every day, and so should we. Prioritization begins with the authorization process, and so does long-term fiscal discipline.

I renew my pledge to work with any Member of this body to identify offsets, to ensure that our actions today never add to the already heavy financial burden we have placed on the next generation of Americans.

It is my hope the committee will abandon the practice of en bloc unanimous consent requests. Each bill should be considered on its merits, and if it is truly worthwhile, should be allowed to stand on its own. As an institution, this Senate is more than capable of this task.

To make the RECORD absolutely clear, I am including the list of non-controversial bills in these packages that should be cleared and allowed to pass under unanimous consent: S. 216, S. 266, S. 241, S. 202, S. 232, S. 262, S. 220, H.R. 386, S. 320, S. 553, H.R. 497, H.R. 658, S. 1139, H.R. 235, H.R. 482, H.R. 467.

#### VETERANS HOSPITALS COMBAT STAPH INFECTIONS

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I find it disturbing and disheartening to know that efforts to heal through modern medicine end up creating new medical problems, in addition to those that are preexisting. Unfortunately, this is what is occurring with the rise of dangerous drug-resistant forms of staph that have become prevalent as of late. I want to talk about the potential dangers of these infections, especially in a medical environment where patients are most vulnerable, and also give much-deserved praise to the Department of Veterans Affairs for their work to combat staph infections in their hospitals.

There are many types of staph bacteria. While some forms of staph are harmless, others are fatal. A recent study conducted by the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology suggests that as many as 1.2 million U.S. hospital patients are infected every year by a form of staph that is resistant to drugs.

Drug-resistant staph, often referred to as MRSA, Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, has adapted in response to common antibiotics which have been used to combat these and

other infections. Most staph infections arise from visits to the hospital and other health care settings.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is taking effective steps to reduce staph infections in their hospitals. Based on a successful pilot program at VA's Pittsburgh health care system, VA has instituted a staph prevention program in all 153 of their hospitals. Their prevention system is based on a strategy of enhanced hygiene and culture change among health care workers. Patients are monitored, proven precautions are followed for those affected, and close attention is paid to common sources of infection. The Pittsburgh pilot led to a 50-percent decline in staph infections, something Acting VA Secretary Gordon Mansfield referred to as "dramatic reductions" in staph infections, and I look forward to similarly positive outcomes across the veterans' health care system.

It is my hope that VA will continue to improve their prevention programs and share information with other health care providers. This will help VA safeguard our veterans and their families from staph infections, serve as a successful model for our country's hospitals and medical facilities, and improve the well-being of our Nation's citizens.

#### TAX RELIEF

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss several important tax relief measures that expire this year.

As several of my colleagues have noted, these provisions are important to many of our folks back home and have a direct impact on their daily lives and pocketbook. This tax relief has put more money in taxpayers' pockets rather than the government coffers and needs to be extended.

I am pleased to introduce legislation to extend two expiring tax relief measures.

The first measure ensures that we continue to provide a 7-year depreciation schedule for motorsports complexes. This is an important tax relief provision to hundreds of race facilities across the country, both large and small.

In Kansas, more than 30 tracks can benefit from this depreciation schedule. It allows race facilities to make important safety and modernization investments under a depreciation schedule that reflects the ongoing need to maintain these facilities.

The largest track in Kansas, the Kansas Speedway, which was just completed in 2001, has been the economic driver in the revitalization of Kansas City, KS. What was once one of the most economically depressed areas in Kansas is now one of the fastest growing. The speedway alone contributed more than \$150 million to the local economy in its first year, creating 3,300 new jobs and generating \$10 million in property taxes and \$26 million in sales taxes.