

years, says Karen Davis, president of the Commonwealth Fund, 32 percent of Americans have had to switch doctors. The result is poor continuity of care—no one to coordinate treatment or watch out for adverse drug interactions. Such failures may contribute to the estimated 44,000 to 98,000 annual deaths from medical mistakes just in hospitals, and to “amenable mortality”—deaths preventable by medical care. Those total about 101,000 a year, reports a new study in the journal *Health Affairs*. That per capita rate puts America dead last of the study’s 19 industrialized countries.

Other data, too, belie the “best in the world” mantra. The five-year survival rate for cervical cancer? Worse than in Italy, Ireland, Germany and others, finds the OECD. The survival rate for breast cancer? You’d do better in Switzerland, Norway, Britain and others. Asthma mortality? Twice the rate of Germany’s or Sweden’s. Some of the U.S. numbers are dragged down by the uninsured; they are twice as likely to have advanced cancer when they first see a doctor than are people with insurance, notes oncologist Elmer Huerta of Washington Hospital Center, president of the American Cancer Society. But the numbers of uninsured are too low to fully explain the poor U.S. showing.

It isn’t realistic to expect America to be the best in every measure of medical quality. And none of this tells us how to reform the U.S. system. But it does say the “best in the world” is misguided medical chauvinism that should not block attempts at reform.

Mr. DURBIN. This column points out that the United States spent almost \$7,000 per person on medical care last year—\$6,697 per capita. That is the highest in the world. It is 20 percent more per person than the next highest spending nation of Luxembourg, and it is more than twice as much as the 30 wealthiest countries around the world.

In a survey of over 1,000 adults, the Harvard School of Public Health and Harris Interactive found that 55 percent thought the United States had the best-quality care in the world.

The fact that we spend so much per person may lead people to that conclusion—that we have the best care. After all, we spend the most money. Yet the facts tell us otherwise. The highest cost doesn’t mean the highest quality. We rank below other nations in many critical health outcomes. There is no doubt in my mind if I were seriously ill in any part of the world, I would try to find my way to the United States. There is no question we have the very best doctors, the very best medical professionals, hospitals, and medical technology.

But when you take a step back and look at the outcomes for the American people, it tells a different story. The 5-year survival rate for cervical cancer in the United States—cervical cancer—is worse than Italy, Ireland, Germany, and many others. The survival rate for breast cancer in the United States is worse than the survivor rate in Switzerland, Norway, Britain, and other nations. Our asthma mortality rate is twice the rate of Germany and Sweden. True, we have the best hospitals but not the best outcomes, in many instances.

Only 66 percent of U.S. patients receive treatments that scientific studies

show to work, such as beta blockers for heart disease, according to the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

According to a 2007 survey by the Independent Commonwealth Fund, adults in the United States are more likely to forgo needed health care than adults in Australia, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Nearly one out of five American adults surveyed said they have serious problems paying medical bills. That is more than double the rate in the next highest country. Nearly a third of those surveyed had spent more than \$1,000 out of pocket in the last year on medical costs not covered by insurance. Only one out of five Australians and one out of eight Canadians spent that much money on out-of-pocket health expenses. No other nation came even close.

Seven years ago, the World Health Organization made the first major effort to rank the health systems of 191 nations. The top two nations in the world: France and Italy. The United States did not even make the top 10; not even the top 20. We ranked 37th in the world, according to the World Health Organization, when it came to our health care systems. We have this vanity in the United States that because we spend so much money on health care, we must be the best in the world. It is not true.

More people die each year from medical and surgical mistakes in the United States than in any other industrialized nation. Incidentally, more Americans die of medical mistakes each year than die from AIDS, breast cancer, and automobile accidents combined.

In health information technology, we lag far behind. By 2005, the United Kingdom had invested 450 times more per person in public funding of health information than the United States. We rank the highest in infant mortality among 23 nations and near the bottom in healthy life expectancy at age 60. We are 15th among 19 countries in deaths from a wide range of illnesses that would not have been fatal if treated timely and in an effective way. We do well in reducing smoking, but we still have the worst rates of obesity.

When you get beyond the myths and look at the studies, it becomes clear. The quality of a nation’s health care is determined not by how much we spend but by whether we provide universal care that works. The United States is the only major industrialized nation without universal health coverage. We cannot give an assurance to every single American that they will have a doctor at hand when they need one. We can’t give them the assurance that they can have basic access to needed health care when they absolutely need it for their family. Other nations have met that responsibility. We have not.

Ironically, the persistent and unfounded belief that Americans receive the best health care is a major reason why we don’t move toward change and

don’t move toward providing the peace of mind which every American and every American family deserves. The health care and insurance companies spend millions of dollars to frighten Americans into thinking that covering everyone with health insurance will somehow mean less coverage for others and less choice for Americans who already have health insurance. That is a scare tactic. Look at all the other countries in the world that have better health care at much lower cost. By the way, when it comes to health care choice—especially choice of doctors—a third of Americans with health insurance say they had to change doctors in the last 3 years because their insurance company insisted on it. One out of three Americans. So the idea that consumers are in charge of their own health care choices is belied by that statistic.

There is no reason why we can’t build a better health care system in America that lowers costs, covers everybody, and makes us a healthier nation. One of the first steps is to get beyond the myths and the vanity and actually look at the facts.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### RECOGNIZING ISRAEL’S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I want to join others of my colleagues in helping the nation of Israel celebrate its 60th anniversary.

The nation of Israel was founded, of course, on May 14, 1948. I think it is appropriate that we honor this ally of the United States and reaffirm the bonds of close friendship and cooperation between our two countries. This alliance, this friendship, has never been more important to the mutual security and safety of our people than it is today. This friendship, of course, spans oceans and is based on shared values.

I was pleased when Congress recently reaffirmed our commitment to preserving and strengthening that alliance by passing a concurrent resolution honoring Israel and recognizing its important mission and its history.

In the face of common threats, our relationship with Israel today is as important as ever. We have mutual goals in defeating radical Islamic terrorism, fostering Middle East stability, and promoting freedom.

Israel has shown an unwavering conviction in democracy, justice, security, and peace. The nation of Israel and its people deserve not only our friendship and our support but our admiration as

well. I extend my warmest congratulations to the State of Israel and the Israeli people for this important anniversary.

#### SENATE INACTION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I want to turn to an important vote that we had yesterday in the Senate. Unfortunately, yesterday morning, we saw only 42 Senators voted to do anything significant about the high price of gasoline at the pump. This is just the latest example, I am afraid, of congressional intransigence and turning a deaf ear to the cries of the American people for Congress to do something to help bring relief at the gas pump. Unfortunately, it is just the latest example.

I know most of us came to Washington to serve in the Congress to try to solve problems. Unfortunately, the mentality inside the beltway seems to be that we ought to spend more time shooting at each other on a partisan political basis and not working together to solve problems. Unfortunately, there are more examples than just high gas prices to demonstrate this mentality.

I will just point to four areas where we have seen significant delays in congressional action that have had tremendous consequences on the American people. First and foremost is on our national security. It was 89 days ago that the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act basically expired. The most recent authorization would have allowed us to continue to listen in to foreign terrorists communicating with each other on the telephone in a way that would allow us to detect and deter terrorist activity and defeat terrorist activity.

Why the House of Representatives and Speaker PELOSI would refuse to allow this important piece of legislation to come to the floor after it passed the Senate on a strong bipartisan vote is, frankly, beyond me. But it has been 89 days now since we have had the ability to detect new terrorist threats, when the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act basically went dark and expired.

Secondly, it has been 540 days since we have failed to act on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Free-trade agreements should not be partisan affairs. It is good, in fact, for us to have free-trade agreements because it opens markets to American farmers and American manufacturers and producers for their goods in other countries. In fact, Colombia does about \$2.3 billion in trade with the State of Texas each year, which is very important to my State. Unfortunately, when Texas sells goods and produce to Colombia, they carry large tariffs, which disadvantages my manufacturers, my producers, and my farmers in Texas, while Colombian goods that are sold in the United States, because of other agreements, basically come in duty free.

Why Speaker PELOSI would fail to allow this important free-trade agree-

ment to be taken up and voted on in the House of Representatives, again, escapes me. This is in the best interest of the United States. It is in the best interest of my State and the people who work there. At a time when we are dealing with stimulus packages because we are concerned about the softening of our economy, what better stimulus could we enact than to pass this free-trade agreement, which would strengthen the robust markets in Colombia for American goods and produce? But here we are 540 days later, and it is bogged down in partisan disagreements.

The next number is another important number. I think one of the most important jobs the Senate has is to take up and consider the nominations of individuals who have been proposed for service on the Federal bench and to serve in that important branch of Government. But we have seen that because of inaction in the Judiciary Committee, on some nominees such as Peter Keisler—nominated more than 685 days ago—and we have seen nominees out of North Carolina pass the 300-day mark without even so much as a hearing in the Judiciary Committee.

This is another example of partisan delays that, frankly, I think frustrates the American people. It certainly frustrates me. It is an example of where we ought to act and find an opportunity to come together to solve a problem, and the problem is particularly in the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, where many litigants simply cannot find access to the courts because there are not enough judges sitting on those benches to listen to cases. Whether you are a crime victim or a small business man or woman or whether you are just a regular citizen in that Fourth District, we have a judicial emergency with about one-third of the seats vacant. Frankly, that creates a lack of access to justice. So, again, it has been 685 days without a vote on some of the nominees in the Judiciary Committee. We need to do better.

Of course, it was 751 days ago when Speaker PELOSI, then running for election, and before the 2006 election, where Democrats were given the majority status in both the House and Senate, said: Elect us and we will produce a commonsense plan to help bring down the price of gasoline at the pump. Unfortunately, the price of gasoline at about the time that she took office as Speaker of the House was about \$2.33 a gallon, I believe. And now, of course, it is about \$3.75 a gallon.

Yesterday, as I mentioned, we had an opportunity to help provide relief for American families, to help them deal with their family budgets when it comes to the cost of gasoline. But I think we took a half step that did not do very much. What I mean by that is we did vote to quit filling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, but if you look at how much oil that represents that would then be available in the open market, it is roughly 70,000 barrels of

oil a day. Now, 70,000 barrels of oil a day sounds like a lot of oil, unless you consider the amount of oil consumed globally by all the countries on the planet. That is 85 million barrels of oil a day. How much of an impact do you think it will have on gasoline at the pump to provide an additional 70,000 barrels of oil, when worldwide consumption is 85 million? You don't have to be a Ph.D. in mathematics to figure that out. It will not be big. As a matter of fact, it will be minuscule—not completely insignificant but not very much.

On the other hand, we had an opportunity to vote to reduce our dependence upon imported oil and gas from dangerous enemies of the United States, countries such as Iran and Venezuela, both of whom are members of OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Unfortunately, the Senate turned down that opportunity to produce as much as 3 million barrels of oil a day from the U.S. reserve because we would not allow or authorize Alaskans to produce oil in Alaska. We would not authorize the States along the Outer Continental Shelf to be able to develop their oil reserves in the Outer Continental Shelf, and we would not allow States in the West to develop the oil shale that could produce massive amounts of oil right here in America, reducing our dependency on imported oil from dangerous countries such as Iran and Venezuela.

What I don't understand is, if our friends across the Senate—and I believe there was only one vote against the decision to stop putting oil in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. But if everybody in the Senate virtually agrees that adding 70,000 barrels of oil to the worldwide supply of oil would help bring down the price of gas at the pump—however minuscule that figure may be—how much more would it be likely to bring down the price of gas at the pump to add 3 million additional barrels to worldwide supply? Of course, this would not be from Saudi Arabia or Iran or Venezuela. It would be from the good old USA.

Again, how many new jobs would that create at home, when our economy has turned soft? It would create a lot of jobs in Texas. I know it would create jobs in Louisiana and, frankly, all over the country.

Instead of taking an opportunity to take a bold move on a bipartisan basis to increase the supply of American oil and gas, we find ourselves with half steps and relatively insignificant votes to increase production. I am glad that, finally, the Congress has recognized that the laws of supply and demand are not inapplicable in the District of Columbia. As a matter of fact, for a long time, it seemed that we outright refused to recognize the economic laws that apply across the planet right here in Washington, DC.

So I ask my friends and colleagues, if you are unwilling to allow us to open