

I hope the President, I hope people on both sides of the aisle here join us in that, in making sure the GI bill of rights at long last is the law of the land.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR). The Senator from Louisiana.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I rise to talk about the need for dramatic, bold health care reform in this country, so every American has real access to good, affordable health care. In doing so, I wrap up a project I began 8 weeks ago with six of my Senate colleagues to highlight our proposed solutions to reforming health care in America.

I start by thanking those colleagues, Senators COBURN, DEMINT, THUNE, ISAKSON, MARTINEZ, and BURR for joining me here on the Senate floor and in other venues to talk about this enormously important challenge for all of us.

We have reaffirmed what I think virtually every American knows, that we are in a health care crisis in this country, and there are some fundamental things broken, some fundamental things wrong with our present health care delivery system.

I want to reaffirm what was said: We need not just tinkering at the edges but some bold, dramatic reform to fix that system and give every American access to good quality and affordable health care.

But I also want to reaffirm there are clear choices to be made, dramatically different alternatives. We have laid out our positive choices in contrast to the other large alternatives, the single payer socialized solution that several of our colleagues here in this body have long advocated.

Our message, my colleagues and mine, Senators COBURN and DEMINT, THUNE, ISAKSON, MARTINEZ, and BURR, has been simple at its core: The health care system must be centered on the doctor-patient relationship. Health care plans must be flexible and there must be real choice. Americans must be able to own and control their own plans and decisions and choose how those plans work for them, and Washington should not control or run or mandate all of this.

We believe individuals and families should own their own health insurance, and we oppose the Government managing or rationing people's health care. We believe individuals are capable and are better than bureaucrats at choosing that coverage which is best suited for their own needs.

We are opposed to forcing people to enroll in a plan versus providing incentives to encourage individuals and families to choose to enroll. We believe existing Government programs can be improved and modernized so they provide more efficient quality care to serve the purpose of their enactment.

In contrast to that, we oppose attempts to expand these specifically targeted programs and make them a Trojan horse for broader overreaching socialized medicine and sickness management by the Federal Government.

Instead of looking to put more people on Government health care, we should assure that the truly indigent have health coverage. My friends and colleagues who tried to rationalize a dramatically expanding SCHIP, for example, the ability to offer Government health care to already insured children, argued we have to put children first. But last year this Senate unfortunately and overwhelmingly rejected an amendment by Senator COBURN that would have assured that all children in the United States would have health care coverage before funding special interest pork projects.

We believe we should open and expand the health insurance marketplace to Americans so they can shop for health care across State lines and let insurance companies compete to provide quality, cost-effective care.

We oppose increasing the number of costly mandates that price individuals in so many cases out of the market and restrict consumer choice and access.

As my friend from South Carolina stated, there are almost 2,000 individual mandates in health care, covering in some cases acupuncturists and hair prostheses.

These mandates obviously drive up the cost of health care. In fact, according to the CBO, for every 1 percent increase in the cost of health care, 300,000 people lose their insurance. So there is a real human cost to so many of these mandates. This is supposed to be a free market society. I am perplexed as to why a consumer in South Carolina should not be able to shop for cheaper health insurance if that product is offered and sold in Louisiana.

This is commonsense reform to drive down mandates to a reasonable level. It would force insurance companies to compete with each other across State lines to offer cheaper quality plans. Americans are able to purchase or invest in almost anything in any State of the Union. This does promote competition. It encourages companies to offer better prices and better quality and more attractive interest rates for savings and better service. Why can't we bring that positive aspect to the market of health insurance?

My colleagues and I who join together in this discussion recognize that seniors have increasingly turned to Medicare Advantage plans because they offer better value, more choice, a higher quality of care than traditional fee-for-service Medicare. We oppose attempts to cut Medicare Advantage and reduce health care choices for seniors. Again, unfortunately, too many folks in this body are moving in the other direction. In fact, the chairman of the Finance Committee has indicated that the majority side of the aisle will offer a Medicare package that will likely

significantly cut funding for the popular Advantage plan.

I have heard from thousands of Louisiana seniors who are overwhelmingly pleased with their Medicare Advantage plans. I hope we can preserve this option for seniors and find a reasonable compromise so we don't cut Medicare Part C and negatively affect those seniors.

We believe we should dramatically reform the tax treatment of health care by providing powerful incentives that will increase access by allowing Americans to keep more of their hard-earned money to pay for health care. We oppose tax increases that do the opposite, that seize American money from American families to pay for government-run and government-dominated health care. That limits access to doctors. It lowers the quality of health services. Addressing health care through our Tax Code would fundamentally change the health care market, if we do it in the right way. By letting Americans keep more of their money for health care through refundable tax credits, we can empower Americans with more resources to obtain and access care.

We have seen the results of increased utilization of health savings accounts. We want to see that when given the freedom to keep their tax-free money for health care, Americans will make conscious efforts to stay healthier, make better health care decisions, and shop for more cost-effective care and services. HSAs, health savings accounts, are a newly implemented concept and one that is working. Americans want choice, and tax advantage options such as HSAs allow for more choice in health care. We know our proposals would reform a broken system into one that is patient centered, high quality, lower cost, and where families choose and own their own health care plan. Government-run health care does not work and limits access and choice for families.

If you do not believe that, look to our neighbors. To the north we see Canada, which has a weekly lottery to see which of their citizens, in essence, can go to the doctor. Look to our friends across the Atlantic, to the British. The British National Health Service recently promised to reduce the wait time for hospital care to 4 months. That is supposed to be a dramatic improvement under that model, under Great Britain's national health care system.

Is that the kind of health care we want Americans to have? I sincerely hope our proposals over the last 8 weeks will be some part of promoting this badly needed debate. I sincerely hope that important debate leads to action, to results in the Senate and the Congress, results for the American people. Health care is one of the most important issues for American families today. It is time we actually do something instead of sitting on our hands in Washington. We need to go back to the

States to talk about how we need to reform the American health care system. It is time to embrace the challenge of health care reform and do something now, not just punt to future Congresses, future Washington politicians, future Presidents.

I hope our discussion over the last 8 weeks helps promote that, not just debate but debate leading to action to improve the lives of all Americans with regard to health care.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. STEVENS. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

ENERGY SUPPLY

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, this morning when I read the Wall Street Journal, I was interested in this article: "Energy Watchdog Warns of Oil Production Crunch." This is the IEA, the International Energy Agency, that makes estimates and keeps the world informed on the status of energy supplies. The conclusion in this article is that the demand for energy throughout the world continues to rise, but the supply is flat.

I think there is no question that this is a problem this country faces, the problem of supply. Too often people in the Senate are unwilling to talk about the problem of supply. As a matter of fact, in 1995, President Clinton vetoed a bill that would have opened a very small portion, about 2,000 acres, of the ANWR coastal plain, which is a million and a half acres set aside for oil exploration. It would have opened it to oil and gas development. That was shortsighted, a mistake, and it has had a devastating effect on Americans.

As this article in the Wall Street Journal points out, it predicts global demand for oil of 116 million barrels per day by 2030. Today the world's demand is only 87 million barrels a day, and we are paying \$135 for each of those barrels. As the demand continues to rise—and we know it will—so will the cost. It will become higher and higher. This is what I have been trying to say now for 20 years in the Senate. We should be able to produce more of America's oil, and we import today 67 percent of our oil.

During the oil embargo in the 1970s, we imported about 34 percent. We are almost totally dependent now on oil from offshore. American oil is not available to this country. The alarming fact is, the military is the largest consumer of oil in the country. It uses about 4.8 billion gallons of oil per year. The problem really is, if we had an embargo today, we could not sustain our military, let alone our essential infrastructure. Our economy could not survive another embargo.

We need to realize we can produce American energy to meet our needs. If we produce it over a period of years, the price will be stabilized. The interesting thing is, on May 1—right here on the Senate floor—the senior Senator from New York called drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge "plain wrong." He said it was an "old saw." He said the field's probable 1 million barrels a day would reduce gas prices "only a penny a gallon."

Then, on May 11, the Senator from New York, Mr. SCHUMER, said:

There is one way to get the price of oil down and it's two words—Saudi Arabia. If they were to increase 800,000 barrels per day, the price would come down probably 35 to 50 cents a gallon. That's a lot.

Now, why would 800,000 barrels of Saudi oil reduce gas prices 50 cents a gallon and 1 million barrels of American-produced oil from our State reduce the price at the pump only a penny?

As a matter of fact, the Senator from New York said this extra supply from Saudi Arabia would probably reduce the price of a gallon of gas by 62 cents before it was all over. Imagine that: 800,000 barrels of oil from Saudi Arabia could bring down the price of a gallon of gasoline by 62 cents. There is an absolute inconsistency with what the Senator from New York has told the Senate. I find that appalling on a thing such as the oil supply now, in view of the price of gasoline for Americans at the pump. They are paying the price because of President Clinton. They are paying the price because of stubborn opposition to develop the resources in my State.

Now, they tell us that drilling in the arctic could harm the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. It will not. As a matter of fact, the land we are going to develop was set aside in the act of 1980, a million and a half acres in the Arctic Plain, so it could be explored. It will not be part of the Arctic Wildlife Refuge until the exploration and development of that area is over.

I think there is no question we have to find a way to have the Members of this body make up their minds: What is the problem America faces today? It is supply. Our demand is increasing, like the rest of the world, but we do not have an American supply of oil. Off our shores, and in the deep water off Alaska, there is a bountiful supply of oil. We have two-thirds of the Continental Shelf of the United States, and there is only one well on that two-thirds of the Continental Shelf.

If you look over to the other side of the Bering Straits in Russia—Russia, which was a net importer of oil just 20 years ago, now is a net exporter of oil. Why? Because they developed the OCS off their shores. They now have a strong economy in Russia. Why? Because they do not export petrodollars anymore. They use money in their own country to finance development in their own country.

We have to make up our minds whether we are going to face blind op-

position, incorrect, and uninformed opposition, or whether we are going to take the actions needed to develop American oil to meet American demand, and whether we are going to use the deep water off our shores to produce oil as does the rest of the world.

Norway produces oil off their shores. Britain produces oil off their shores. As a matter of fact, we produce oil off our southern shore, but we are prevented from producing oil off our northern shore. It is absolutely inconsistent and irrational what we are facing.

Our pipeline, at its peak, was transporting 2.1 million barrels of oil to the west coast of the United States. Today, it is producing about 700,000 barrels a day. It is two-thirds empty, in effect. It would not need a new pipeline to carry the oil that would be produced in ANWR. It is there. It could carry more than 1 million barrels a day easily. Yet it has been opposed. It has been opposed for over 20 years, by the same irrational people who come to the floor and say: Oh, oh, Saudi Arabia, produce more oil. Produce 800,000 barrels of oil a day, and we can probably expect gas prices at the pump to come down 62 cents. But if you bring 1 million barrels of oil down from Alaska, it is only going to affect the price by a penny.

I have to tell you, we have to have smarter energy solutions. I hope the time will come when we have a rational debate on this floor. I am reminded of that rational debate when we finally approved the legislation that brought about the construction of the Alaska oil pipeline in the 1970s. We waited 4 years for that pipeline to start because of stubborn opposition from the extreme environmentalists. It was finally overcome. That opposition was overcome by an act that was started right here on the floor of the Senate, which closed the courts of the United States to any further litigation over building that pipeline.

We were just following the oil embargo. America realized we had to have more American oil. There was no filibuster on this floor. The vote was 49 to 49, and that tie was broken by the then-Vice President.

Now, what has happened? Why should every time we bring up ANWR we have a filibuster? Why can't we bring to the American continent the resources of the continent that happen to be in our State?

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, I am happy to yield to my friend.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I say to the Senator, I do not want to disrupt your line of thinking because I agree so much with you. But every time I hear people talking about ANWR, and I hear people talking about stopping any drilling or exploration in ANWR, it occurs to me, here you are, the senior Senator from Alaska. You have been here for a long time, and I have gone with you up to the area in which you