

going to lead to higher premiums. I argue as well, in addition to higher premiums, there will be higher taxes and Medicare cuts.

You are also going to see a significant reduction in the quality of service in this country, as you have more and more government expansion in Washington, DC, more and more government involvement in the decisions that are made. The government will now put mandates on what types of policies meet their threshold, their standard. I think, inevitably, in every model around the world where you have that level of government intervention, it leads to a rationing of care, denials of care, and delays with respect to care.

I argue that the whole idea of this being characterized or labeled as reform is completely mislabeled. There is nothing that is reform about this. It raises premiums, raises taxes, and cuts Medicare. I think you are going to see, in addition to that, diminishment in the services that are available to people in this country through many of these programs.

What is the alternative? We believe that rather than throwing the entire health care system overboard in this country, we ought to be looking at what we can do on a step-by-step basis to improve it. Republicans have offered a number of alternatives. We can allow buying insurance across State lines. We believe interstate competition in buying insurance would put downward pressure on prices in this country. That is a good solution. We can have small business health plans, allowing small businesses to join groups. Group purchasing power will bring downward pressure on insurance prices. By the way, that is something a number of us voted for many times here in the Congress. It has always been defeated. Also, we can deal with the issue of medical malpractice reform, which, according to CBO, has significant savings—\$54 billion. That applies to the government side of health care. If you extend that to private health care—I think there are estimates that defensive medicine in this country costs \$100 billion to \$200 billion annually. So if you could address that issue that deals with litigation costs and defensive medicine, you would see savings grow over the estimates of the CBO.

Having said that, those are several things, just off the top right there, that we think are step-by-step improvements in our health care system in this country. That doesn't throw overboard everything that is good about American health care. It doesn't move us toward a government plan or a single-payer system like they have in Europe, Canada, or someplace like that. It preserves the competition we have in the marketplace today and a market-based delivery system for health care in this country.

We will continue to talk about those ideas, as well as many others, including providing tax credits that will give access to health care for those who

don't have it. There is a way to do that that is very simple.

By the way, the Baucus bill, the Finance Committee bill, still leaves 29 million people in this country without health insurance. In spite of \$1.8 trillion in spending, new taxes, higher premiums, and everything that goes with that, you are still not getting many of the people who don't have health insurance covered.

We think the bill that will be brought before the Senate—we don't know what it is at this point because it is being written behind closed doors—is the wrong approach, and the correct approach is a step-by-step process that addresses the shortcomings, the flaws, and attempts to fix those in a way that doesn't bust the bank or the budget, that doesn't raise taxes on consumers and raise premiums for health care consumers, and that doesn't cut Medicare for seniors across this country and for many of the providers that are out there.

Mr. President, I hope that as the American people listen to this debate, they will engage on this issue; that the bill—whatever comes out of the discussions going on in the leader's office, I hope there is an ample amount of time for the American people to analyze it and for Members of the Senate to digest it. This is literally one-sixth of the American economy. We are talking about reorganizing one-sixth of our entire economy. We should do it with great deliberation and great diligence and with a great amount of care and, I argue, not by throwing the current system overboard and wrecking it but by taking a step-by-step approach that improves the system we have today and provides access to those who don't have health insurance and does something to bend the cost curve down and drive health care costs down rather than raising them, like all the bills that have been produced by the Democratic majority in the Congress.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I wish to spend a few minutes talking on an issue that I think is of concern to tens of millions of senior citizens. Before that, I ask unanimous consent for Senator CHAMBLISS to follow me on the floor.

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

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as you know, today the Social Security Administration announced there will be no COLA, or cost of living increase, next year for more than 50 million seniors. That is the first time in 35 years that situation has occurred, and it worries me very much.

About a month ago, I introduced legislation which the occupant of the chair is a cosponsor of, along with Senators LEAHY, DODD, STABENOW, BEGICH, and CASEY.

I ask unanimous consent to add Senator MIKULSKI and Senator TOM UDALL as cosponsors of S. 1685.

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

Mr. SANDERS. We are all saying that in the midst of this major economic downturn, the worst recession since the Great Depression, while we are keenly concerned about the 9.8 million Americans who are unemployed officially, the Americans who have given up looking for work, the millions of Americans who are working part time when they want to work full time—when you add that all together, that is something like 17 percent of our workforce, about 26 million Americans. We are concerned about that issue, and we have to do everything we can to make sure we get this economy going in a way that benefits not just Wall Street but ordinary Americans.

While we remain concerned about the need to start creating the millions of jobs the middle class in this country desperately need, we cannot turn our backs on the senior citizens of this country. What we are seeing today is that millions of seniors are facing extremely high prescription drug costs. They are facing very high health care costs. We have to address that issue.

The legislation I introduced—and it was introduced by Congressman DEFAZIO in the House—would provide a one-time \$250 payment for more than 50 million seniors and disabled veterans. We would pay for that cost of about \$14 billion by raising the Social Security tax on people who earn between \$250,000 and \$359,000, on a 1-year basis—about \$14 billion.

What I am delighted about is that yesterday President Obama announced his support for the concept of a \$250 one-time payment to our seniors on Social Security and to disabled veterans. He did not yet determine, in his judgment, the best way to fund that program. I think it is a real step forward that he is doing that. I am delighted that the majority leader, Senator REID, has also been very strong on saying we have to make sure our seniors get some help this year, as has Speaker PELOSI and the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Congressman RANGEL. I think we are making some real steps in the right direction.

Let me quote what the President said because I think he was right on:

Even as we seek to bring about recovery, we must act on behalf of those hardest hit by this recession. That is why I am announcing my support for an additional \$250 in emergency recovery assistance to seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities to help them make it through these difficult times. These payments will provide aid to more than 50 million people in the coming year, relief that will not only make a difference for them, but for our economy as a whole, complementing the tax cuts we've provided working families and small businesses through the Recovery Act.

I very much appreciate that support from the President.

The bottom line is that this legislation is now in our jurisdiction. My

hope and expectation is that we are going to move it as quickly as possible. With the President's support, we should be able to accomplish that in a short while.

In Vermont, I can tell you there are many seniors making the difficult choice about whether or not to heat their homes or pay for prescription drugs. Those are choices Americans should not have to make. Many seniors are also going to be seeing an increase in the cost of Medicare Part D.

If we do not deliver on this one-time \$250 payment, you are going to see millions of seniors with a reduced amount in their Social Security check. That is not acceptable.

I think we are making some progress on this issue. Again, I thank Senator REID for his strong support, Speaker PELOSI for her support, and most important, the President for his support. Let's get this done on behalf of seniors and disabled veterans. I think we will have done something that is very important.

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

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

RETIREMENT OF FURMAN BISHER

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise to honor a giant in the world of journalism, Furman Bisher.

Last Saturday, after nearly 60 years of elegant observation of the sports world for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, my friend Furman Bisher pecked out his last and final column before retirement on the thinning keys of his trusty, old Royal typewriter. His choice of instrument to convey his thoughts in this age of instantaneous, inane chatter says a lot about why newspaper readers, after all these years, have continued to seek out his column on the AJC's sports page.

It all comes down to this: Furman's graceful prose, courtly voice, and sharp observations are unfailingly backed up by his old-fashioned shoe-leather reporting. He gloried in doing his homework, making that extra call, interviewing one more player or assistant coach or trainer in order to breathe even more life into the game or the race or the fight for his readers.

It is also why Furman has become a Georgian—and American—institution.

Simply put, Furman Bisher loved sports and he loved journalism. At age 90, he was still driving out on summer nights to cover minor league baseball games.

In his career, Furman scored many journalistic knockouts, including a 1949 interview with Shoeless Joe Jackson, the only one Jackson ever gave re-

garding his involvement in the 1919 Black Sox scandal.

He got stock tips from Ty Cobb and watched every Masters, including Jack Nicklaus's 1986 Masters victory, which he gloried in. He sat in the press box at countless Falcons games at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium and the Georgia Dome and covered the Olympics, both winter and summer.

He wrote 11 books, including co-authoring two editions of a Hank Aaron autobiography. At the Masters Tournament in Augusta every April, Furman reigned among the azaleas and oaks as the dean of the sports press corps.

In a testament to his longevity in a tough business, Furman has covered every Kentucky Derby since 1950 and every Super Bowl but the first one.

Furman even branched out into TV. Although I did not grow up in Atlanta, I have heard from many people that preachers across the city would cut a sermon short so that their congregations could be home for Furman's kickoff on "Football Review."

Along the way, he earned the respect of his colleagues and the loyalty of his readers, garnering writing awards too numerous to mention. Red Smith is acknowledged as probably the dean of all journalists from a sports perspective, and Furman Bisher has often been referred to as the "Red Smith of the South." He served as president of the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association from 1974 to 1976, and of the Football Writers Association of America from 1959 to 1960. His features have appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Golf Digest*, and *Sports Illustrated*, to name but a few.

In 1961, *Time* magazine named him one of the five best columnists in the Nation. I would argue that even today, that honor still fits.

No less than the great Jack Nicklaus said of Furman's retirement:

He might be turning in his last column for the newspaper, but Furman will never stop writing or giving his opinion. I guess you could say that when it comes to the last writings of Furman Bisher, I will believe it when I don't see it.

Furman would close every column with a single valediction—the word "selah," a Hebrew word that ends many Psalms and that exhorts the reader to reflect.

It is appropriate then to reflect on Furman's long, fruitful career, one that began in Atlanta as the Korean war was starting, when Joe Louis was still boxing, when the Minneapolis Lakers were the NBA champs, before Willie Mays had joined the Major Leagues, and before *Sports Illustrated* even existed.

Ever since, with wit and style, Furman Bisher has chronicled the triumphs and the travails of the sports world and its often all too human heroes.

Furman is leaving the AJC at almost 91 years old, and he is still going strong. While we may not be seeing his

column on a regular basis, I am quite sure we have not heard the last of Furman Bisher. As Furman would say, selah. I am thankful for Furman Bisher.

I yield the floor, and I 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. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I know the hour is late and many are ready to end the week. I wish to say a few words tonight about the challenge we have with regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan and our strategy going forward.

I spent some time in the last couple of weeks talking about the obligation we have in the Senate to have a full debate on these issues and not simply to point down Pennsylvania Avenue and say the White House has to do this or that or the President has to do this or that.

It is important, I believe, that the President and his team have taken the kind of time they have to get the strategy right with regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan. But I believe the Congress has a role to play. If we simply fall into partisan corners with regard to our strategy in Afghanistan and dust off and reintroduce talking points from the war in Iraq, we will not get it right; we will get it wrong.

I believe we have to listen to a lot of different points of view. The President has undertaken that kind of review, and we have to do that as well.

Part of that is doing what we have already begun to do, which is to have a series of hearings.

In the Foreign Relations Committee, we have had a number of hearings. I know the Presiding Officer, as a member of the Intelligence Committee and his work as a Senator, has engaged in this review as well. We are trying to get different points of view in front of us. I know Chairman KERRY and the Foreign Relations Committee have had too many hearings to count, and not just in the last couple of weeks but over many months.

Chairman LEVIN and the Armed Services Committee have outlined a strategy, or at least an approach to part of a strategy, to focus on building up the Afghan National Army and the police on an accelerated basis so we can begin to move the responsibility more to the Afghan people and the Afghan governing institutions as opposed to having the United States and other coalition partners bear this responsibility solely. Chairman LEVIN has spent a good deal of time trying to contribute to this debate.

We have heard both Democrats and Republicans contributing to this discussion. As much as we have heard