

increasing government spending or increasing the size and scope of government.

That is the kind of health care reform the American people deserve, and it is the direction the health care debate should take.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Florida is recognized for 20 minutes.

NATIONAL DEBT AND FEDERAL DEFICIT

Mr. LEMIEUX. Mr. President, it is an honor for me to stand on the floor of the Senate, on behalf of my State of Florida and before this Nation, to give my maiden speech. First, let me thank my wife Meike for her support. No one succeeds in life alone. That is certainly true for me. She is the strength of our growing family of five, soon to be six. I would not be here without her love and support.

It is humbling to think of those who have come before me and spoken before this body on the great issues of the day. I will not seek to match their skill in poetry or prose, but I will work to honor them with clear and straightforward language, passion to find solutions to the challenges that face us, and resolve to follow words with deeds. It is the tradition of this Chamber, as Senator Ted Kennedy stated in his maiden speech nearly 50 years ago, that "a freshman Senator should be seen, not heard; should learn, not teach." But similar to Senator Kennedy, who asked for the dispensation of his colleagues to speak to the great cause of civil rights being debated at the time, I, too, seek the consideration of my colleagues to rise and speak at such a critical time in our Nation's history.

During my first week here, the senior Senator from Ohio, Mr. VOINOVICH, told me that while my time in the Senate may be short, just 16 months, it might be the most important 16 months in modern history. My brief experience here has confirmed the wisdom of his insight.

The issue that commands the attention of this Congress is the health of our people and proposals that address the problem of those who cannot afford or simply do not have health insurance. We seek solutions to the rising costs of medical procedures and hospital stays. We are in search of ways to ensure that every American has access to affordable and quality health care. These are noble goals. Floridians and Americans are struggling with the high cost of health care. Premiums for family health care have risen 131 percent over the past 10 years. Working families are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. Between the demands of taxes and insurance, families have less and less to save and spend on their own priorities.

Health care costs are burdensome on seniors as well, who, while covered by

Medicare, often buy additional insurance to supplement their needs. Rising costs for seniors living on fixed incomes prove more than difficult. Still more troubling are those who have no insurance at all—some 4 million Floridians and an estimated 45 million Americans nationwide. For many of the uninsured, a serious illness or an accident is all that may separate them from bankruptcy.

I believe the problem of health care must be addressed. No American should be denied access to quality health care. No American should be rendered destitute by illness. No American family should have to live paycheck-to-paycheck because they cannot find affordable health care. The problem is great, and it is one worthy of our full attention.

But before we can address health care and the cost of reform, we need to consider the broader state of affairs in which we as Americans find ourselves. We need to draw back the curtain, widen the lens. No issue, even one as important as health care, stands alone. We have responsibilities in other equally important areas such as national defense, education, and the economy.

Balanced equally with all these priorities must be our ability to afford them. Our Nation's spending problem is not a topic that many like to discuss. It is, after all, more desirable to speak of new ideas and grand plans for the future, but that very future is at stake if we do not address the problem now.

Our national debt grows at an alarming rate of nearly \$4 billion a day. When I took office, just 5 weeks ago, our national debt was \$11.7 trillion. Today it is nearly \$12 trillion. During the time it will take for me to give this address, it will increase by another \$50 million.

Since the debate on health care began in March to the time it likely concludes at the end of this year, we will have amassed an additional \$1 trillion, near to the very amount we are discussing for this health care proposal. Instead of spending less to stem the tide, we learned last Friday that in the fiscal year we just completed, Congress amassed a record-setting \$1.4 trillion budget deficit—a larger single-year deficit than the deficits of the last 4 years combined.

Our Government spending is out of control and it is simply unsustainable. Why does it matter? What is the consequence of accumulating trillions of dollars in debt? What does it mean for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren? The consequences are a government hamstrung by its obligations and a people taxed beyond their ability to prosper. Last year, our Nation spent \$253 billion alone on the interest payments for our debts. That is a statement worth repeating. Last year, our country spent \$253 billion alone on interest payments, the third highest expenditure in the Federal budget. That is nearly \$700 million in taxpayer dollars spent on interest, every day—

money that could be spent on worthwhile programs or, better still, returned to the people because, after all, it is their money.

In 10 years, the White House projects our national debt will be a staggering \$23 trillion, surpassing the total value of goods and services made in the United States in 1 year. I have not been in Washington for long so it is hard for me to comprehend the idea of \$1 billion, let alone \$1 trillion. I think that is true for most Americans. So it is worth a moment to understand the enormity of these figures.

If you were to lay down single dollar bills, edge to edge, \$1 million would cover two football fields; \$1 billion would cover the city of Key West, FL, 3.7 square miles; and \$1 trillion, laid edge to edge, would cover the State of Rhode Island—twice.

Still more staggering, from the time our Government began in 1789, it took 167 years for the Federal Government to spend its first \$1 trillion. This year we will spend \$3 trillion. Increasing debt and increasing costs of entitlement spending and increasing interest payments mean we are on a path which is unsustainable. The American people know this and they are showing their frustration with Congress's out-of-control spending. We need to learn from families in America. Families in America and across Florida deal with their budgets every day. They sit around the kitchen table. They look at what they make and what they spend and they try to make ends meet.

But the Federal Government is similar to that family with the credit card debt—every month the debt grows, the interest compounds. The family spends more and more just to make the minimum payment. Yet the balance due continues to grow. In order to get out of debt, the family has to do the right thing, it has to cut spending or mom or dad have to get another job. If the family does the right thing, pays off its debt, it can save a little, build a nest egg, and recover. If they do not, they reach that point where the debt grows out of control. They reach the point where they are too far gone.

The Federal Government has reached that moment in time. In the past 27 years, we have gone from \$1 trillion to \$12 trillion in December, and it is estimated that by the end of 10 years, we will be \$24 trillion in debt. The point of no return is upon us. We must recognize this simple truth: We cannot afford the Government we have, let alone the Government the majority in this Chamber wants. We ought to be cutting taxes, not raising them; we ought to be spending within our means, not increasing our debt; we ought to be fighting with the same vigor to cut waste, fraud, and abuse that some fight to create new entitlement programs we cannot afford.

It has also become clear that our policies of limitless spending threaten to devalue the dollar.

Recent reports suggest a rush by U.S. investors to pull their money from domestic investments and instead seek opportunity in emerging markets. Investors find markets such as China and Brazil to be more attractive because those nations use their financial reserves to weather the economic crisis.

There is also talk in the international community that perhaps the dollar is no longer the best benchmark for their reserve currencies. According to the International Monetary Fund, the dollar is held now at its lowest point on record in reserve currency of the central banks around the world.

Our unsustainable spending and debt and our inability to make the difficult decisions necessary to change course is decreasing confidence in our Nation abroad, and if not corrected, it will impact the quality of life for all Americans.

What is the answer? The answer is we have to stop. We have to stop financing today's programs on the backs of future generations. Common sense tells us we need to balance the Federal budget. The Federal Government has not done that since 2001. There is no reason why it cannot happen again. The Framers' ideal of limited government is one we need to pursue and we need to do it if we have the will to make it so.

As the father of three young sons and a baby on the way, one of my greatest concerns is that 1 day one of my children will come to me when they are grown and say that they are moving to another country, perhaps a place such as Ireland or Chile, because they believe the opportunities are greater than the promise and the opportunities of America.

Even now, as many as 200,000 skilled American workers could leave for places such as China and India in the next 5 years. America has always been the land of opportunity, a beacon for those who seek a better life. That life cannot be darkened.

Let us not stand witness to the decline of our great Nation. Let us not sit idly by so that the work and sacrifice of those who came before us can be squandered. Let us not miss out on this moment in time to shoulder the burden of leadership to do what we must do for our children, their children, and the American dream.

Their future is bound to the decisions we make. I come from a State where a balanced budget is a constitutional requirement, where lawmakers are required to spend within their means. And it is not always easy. In fact, it is often a painstaking process that requires leadership and tough choices, with Republicans and Democrats sitting down together to make responsible decisions.

In the past 3 years in Florida, Governor Crist and the Florida legislatures have cut spending by more than \$7 billion, almost 10 percent of the State budget. Florida has made tough choices because it must, because lawmakers in

1838 adopted language requiring our State to have a balanced budget.

It works for Florida and 41 other States, and it can work for our Nation. The Federal Government should be held to the same standard. This Congress must balance its budget. There is no reason why Congress cannot do what American families and the majority of States do. There is also no reason why the President of the United States should not have the same powers as 43 Governors do to strike wasteful spending with a line item veto. These issues are not partisan. Republicans and Democrats alike should chart a course to a balanced budget to reduce the national debt and restore the American dream.

We were promised a budget deficit-neutral health care plan. President Obama said to a joint session of Congress, he "will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficit now or in the future."

I am encouraged by the President's words, but I am concerned by the proposals we have seen. Cutting a half trillion dollars from Medicare is not budget neutral. Shifting costs to the States for increases in Medicaid is not responsible. And taxing medicine and life-saving devices will increase, not decrease, the cost of health care. That is not reform.

The fact is, we do not know where the money is coming from to pay for the proposed health care plan, and in light of our desperate financial situation, we cannot budget on faith alone. Last week I participated in a hearing to discuss runaway premiums in a program designed to let Federal employees buy long-term health care. Employees were given two options: a fixed option that had a higher cost but guaranteed that premiums would not go up, and a variable option which was less expensive but it provided no guarantee.

Smart Federal employees paid a little more to get that guaranteed Federal plan. But it is not going to be that way. Because now the Federal Government has come back and said: We were wrong. We cannot insure the premiums at the guaranteed rate. We are going to raise your rates by 25 percent.

The government made a mistake. The government got it wrong. And now these Federal employees who did the right thing are going to have to pay for it, more than 6,000 of them from Florida. If the Federal Government cannot get it right for 250,000 Federal employees, how is the government going to get it right for 45 million Americans?

I stand with my colleagues on this side of the aisle ready to create access to health care without sacrificing quality. But it has to make financial sense. We stand ready to address the issue of portability, allowing people to keep their health insurance whether they change jobs or move across State lines. We stand ready to offer ideas to make health insurance more affordable for small businesses, which can join exchanges to offer lower premiums for

their employees. We stand ready to address the high incidence of doctors practicing defensive medicine, which steadily drives up costs. Finally, we stand ready to focus on stopping the estimated \$60 billion in Medicare waste, fraud, and abuse, and using those funds to care for our people.

Current proposals do little to address these problems. We want to work in a bipartisan fashion to create a bipartisan bill. Spend less, save more on this and in everything. The reality is that our Nation is hungry for a new course, a course that takes greater care of the people's money. Some may call this thinking naive, but I call it hopeful.

Since our Nation was founded, there has been one constant our people have carried forth. I consider it the American creed, and the creed is this: Each generation has the obligation to provide a better future for its children than the generation before. We cannot fulfill this promise on our current course. That truth is so evident even our children understand it.

I close with the words of one of my constituents, 12-year-old Joshua Mailho of Niceville, FL. Joshua is concerned about the very issues we are talking about today. He is concerned with his share of the national debt and how he is going to pay for it.

He wrote to me in September and this is what he wrote:

Here is an example of how long me, a 12 year old, would have to pay off my share of the national debt. If I worked at Home Depot and I get paid \$10 per hour . . . it would take me almost 8 years of full-time work [to reach \$161,000] . . . my share of the national debt.

He goes on to say:

This debt will affect all of the kids in America . . . so please find a way to fix your own mistakes, before the children of today have to pay for your mistakes tomorrow.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, let me be the first to congratulate the junior Senator from Florida on his thoughtful and very persuasive initial speech here in the Senate.

I think I can safely say, after observing his work for the last 5 weeks, that the people of Florida are very fortunate to have such an intelligent and insightful Senator. He is doing an excellent job on their behalf. I again congratulate him on his initial speech here in the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I want to join with our colleagues on the floor in thanking my new colleague from Florida, with whom I have had the pleasure of starting a very fast and meaningful friendship.

As he knows, his predecessor Mel Martinez and I had a friendship that had spanned more than three decades. I am equally enthusiastic about this opportunity to represent the State of Florida with Senator LEMIEUX.

Let me say that as I was listening to the Senator's maiden speech, of course

I reflected back 9 years ago to my maiden speech. And, interestingly, at that time—I think it was about 6 weeks after I had been here, so it was the middle of February 2001—I spoke on the budget and the fact that we had a surplus, and how we wanted to keep that surplus and not go into deficit, a lot of the same themes the new Senator from Florida has sounded here today.

Of course, your maiden speech in this August body is quite memorable. I did not have the luxury, as the new Senator from Florida has, to have a number of his colleagues sitting here. As a matter of fact, it was an empty Chamber for this Senator save for the Presiding Officer. But in the course of this speech, I mentioned that it was my maiden speech. I am proceeding on. All of a sudden the doors, these side doors, swing open, and in strides the senior Senator from West Virginia, the person who is a walking political history book. He assumes his position in this chair right here. I get through with my remarks, and he says: "Will the Senator from Florida yield?"

I said: "Of course I yield to the senior Senator from West Virginia."

He proceeds to give, off the top of his head, a history of the Senate maiden speeches. And, of course, what a memorable event that was for this Senator in his maiden speech, and it will be equally a memorable event for the new Senator from Florida. I join our colleagues in congratulating him on his maiden speech.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 469 and the Senate resuming legislative session, the Senate then proceed to vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to S. 1776.

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

The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, as you well know, being one of the freshmen Senators, along with me and a number of others of us, we have been coming to the floor for the past several weeks to talk about the need to address health care reform.

We are here again this morning for the next hour to talk about why this is so imperative. I am going to yield my time, about 5 minutes initially to Senator WARNER, who has another engagement and needs to be off. So at this point I yield 5 minutes to Senator WARNER.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank my colleague, the Senator from New Hampshire, for leading the freshmen Senators here this morning as we once again take the floor to talk about health care reform.

I also commend my friend, the junior Senator from Florida, for his comments today. I share his views about the necessity of bringing our Federal deficit in line.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, we have a balanced budget requirement and we meet our budget every year. I am proud of the fact that Virginia has been named the best managed State in America. So I do have to take issue with some of the comments made by my colleagues, who I think understand States' needs. The fastest growing costs in my State, as well as the State of Colorado, New Hampshire, and I would assume the State of Florida, are health care costs.

Medicaid is going to bankrupt virtually every State in the Nation by 2025 if we do not act. I hope for, and welcome, my colleagues' efforts to try to reach a bipartisan consensus on health care reform.

I will again make the point I have made repeatedly over the last few weeks: What happens if we don't act? What happens if we simply kick the can down the road another 10 years? That is the appeal I make to my colleagues on the other side. Join us. Particularly join the freshmen Senators, who don't come to the Senate with the same background of the last 20 years and experience of past battles. Join a group who does, however, come to this body wanting to do the people's business. That means driving down health care costs, expanding coverage, and making sure our health care system is financially sustainable.

If we don't act, not only will States' increasing Medicaid costs go unmet, State budgets will not be balanced. If we don't act, the Federal deficit will explode. The largest driver of the deficit is not the TARP spending or stimulus spending; it is health care spending. If we don't act, the current Medicare Program, which seniors depend on, will go bankrupt by 2017. That is not a political statement; that is a fact.

If we don't act, American companies will not be competitive in the global economy. We have the most productive workforce in the world. But no American company can compete when they have built in health care costs of \$3,000 to \$4,000 more per worker than any other competitor in the world. If we don't act, for the 65 percent of us who get our health care coverage through the private insurance market, an average Virginia family will be paying 40 percent of their disposable income on health insurance premiums within the next decade.

I ask my colleague from Florida and others on the other side of the aisle to join us in this bipartisan effort to reform health care. This morning we will lay out how we think health care reform can both expand coverage and drive down costs. We will look at some of the models currently being used by large employers who have had the flexibility to design their own benefit plans. These models have successfully

driven down costs by putting in place prevention and wellness activities, negotiating better prices with providers, and restructuring a financial incentive system which currently rewards hospitals based on higher readmission rates, rather than quality care.

I thank the Senator from New Hampshire for organizing the freshmen one more time. As a former Governor, I know she has been a leader on issues like Medicaid and health care costs. I call on my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to actually join in this effort to make sure we do achieve bipartisan health care reform.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. I thank the Senator from Virginia for his comments. As he said, our health care system is on an unsustainable path. Now is the time to fix it.

Health care has not been working for families, for workers, for businesses, and for the Nation's economy. Today we are actually going to talk about some of the good news we know we can accomplish with health care reform. We are going to talk about what health care reform can do to help those families, workers, and the economy. It is our opportunity to control costs for Americans and to improve quality.

Let me be clear: We can control cost and improve quality at the same time. When we do this, we have to remember to keep patients at the center of the debate. The truth is, in so many cases the health care industry can do more for less. Usually I like to tell a story about what is going on with my constituents. It helps us keep people at the center of the debate.

Today I want to talk about some of the innovative health quality initiatives happening in New Hampshire. We all know hospital readmissions are a costly problem in the country. We have an exciting program going on in Manchester, the State's largest city, at the Elliot Senior Health Center. They recognized what was happening with readmissions. They recognized that hospital discharges can be confusing and sometimes overwhelming for seniors and that providing a little extra attention to help those seniors as they are transitioning out of the hospital can help keep them from being readmitted. They developed a program they call the TRACE Program. TRACE provides seniors with a health coach who helps patients with the tools and support to take a more active role in managing their medical care. The support those patients receive improves their understanding not only of their own health care, of the health care system in general, it helps keep them out of the hospital.

Senator COLLINS and I have introduced a bill that would help do this systemwide called the Medicare Transitional Care Act. It builds on successful programs such as the one at the Elliot Senior Health Center. Our legislation would improve the quality of care, reduce hospital readmissions, and