MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. 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. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, we have been waiting for many weeks while the Democratic leadership worked behind closed doors to write a new health care reform bill. Rather than trying to build consensus for a bill that could get broad-based support, they toiled in secret, but at long last this new health care reform plan is finally public. They have come forward to at last reveal the legislative language for a health care reform bill that the Democrats intend to bring to the floor.

We know where they started. We know the changes they made along the way. Those in this Chamber will recall they worked for months in the Senate Finance Committee on health reform. Those in this Chamber will recall the changes they made along the way. Those in this Chamber will recall the changes they made along the way.

Since most state and local governments are required to balance their operating budgets, the declining fiscal conditions shown in our simulations suggest that, without intervention, these governments would need to make substantial policy changes to avoid growing fiscal imbalances.

This, too, is the crisis facing the Medicaid Program today. So both of the two major Federal health care programs are in very serious trouble. It is estimated that 300 or more million people who live here. If reforms to health care are not done carefully—and I say "carefully" because I am not saying that they should not be done—this is going to make the situation far worse, not better. Anyone listening would have no doubt of the ability of Congress to make it worse.

These dire economic implications are not the only thing at stake with health care reform. Besides the significant economic implications of health care reform, this is a bill that affects everyone in another very important way. It affects everyone's health by changing the way we get health care in this country. It touches the lives of every family, every senior, every child, every student. In plain language, it affects everybody: the 306 million people who live here now and the many more people who will be living here in the future.

It makes changes to health care that will be nearly impossible to undo. The reforms these bills contemplate will make long lasting changes to our health care system. These are changes that all of us will have to live with for decades to come. Health reform presents this Chamber with a bill that has significant economic implications at a time when all eyes are focused on the economy, so focused on the economy that it almost reminds me of how President Clinton got elected on the campaign slogan, "It's the economy, stupid." This health care reform bill is a bill that will make permanent changes to our system of health care.

For all of these reasons, it makes it all the more important that this magnitude of this bill be done with broad-based support in this Chamber and across the country. This broad-based support was something Senator BAUCUS and I focused on in our work on the Finance Committee, as we were trying to bring forth a bill that would be bipartisan.

In the Finance Committee, we believed strongly that the significance should be done with broad-based support; in other words, health care is a life-or-death issue for every American, and it affects $1 out of every $6 spent in America. Because it is so big, that is the basis for that statement: "broad-based support."

Under the leadership of Senator BAUCUS, chairman of the Finance Committee, we started last year with a bipartisan health care reform summit. We held 20 hearings. We held three public forums this year on options for financing, coverage, and delivery system reform. We invited in experts from across the country. We invited anyone to submit input to the committee on those options, and we received over 600 sets of comments on the option papers.

Senator BAUCUS and I developed the broad outlines of what we believed would be a good reform package. That broad outline reflected the input we had received from the expert panels. We wanted to do this and we sat down with four other leaders on the issue of health care in this very Chamber. That group soon became known as the group of six. That group began meeting in June to take that framework and finish the details. We met for untold hours. We consulted with experts at the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation. We invested a tremendous amount of time and effort to develop a bipartisan package.

Then what happens around here too often? People get impatient. In this case, the Democratic leaders got impatient. They wanted the reform bill to be finished faster. They were more concerned with health care reform getting done right now rather than getting done right. We said we needed to give the process the time it needed. We said we were not going to be bound by arbitrary deadlines. We wanted to get the job done right. But when the first of September rolled around, they were not willing to give the group of six any more time.

As a result, the Democratic leaders pulled the plug on that bipartisan agreement and the hope for broad bipartisan support ended at that point. Ultimately, the Finance Committee reported out a bill that did not have that broad bipartisan support, the support we had hoped for earlier in the year. The bigger and far more liberal agenda driven by the White House and the Democratic leadership went beyond where the true consensus on reform exists.

Now the next step in this process has begun to emerge. We have been working with the HELP Committee and the Finance Committee. That job fell to the Democratic leader and the chairman of the two committees. But, ultimately, their