

call up his amendment and that it be reported by number only.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

SERVICE MEMBERS HOME OWNER-SHIP TAX ACT OF 2009—MOTION TO PROCEED

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Madam President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 175, H.R. 3590, and I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 175, H.R. 3590.

Harry Reid, Tom Harkin, Jack Reed, Edward E. Kaufman, Jeff Merkley, Roland W. Burris, Daniel K. Akaka, Patty Murray, Richard Durbin, Sherrod Brown, Michael F. Bennet, Jeanne Shaheen, Sheldon Whitehouse, Bill Nelson, Mark Udall, Benjamin L. Cardin, Christopher J. Dodd, Patty Murray.

Mr. REID. I ask that the mandatory quorum required under rule XXII be waived.

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

Mr. REID. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Mr. FRANKEN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak in morning business for up to 5 minutes.

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

COBRA SUBSIDY EXTENSION AND ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. FRANKEN. Madam President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to support S. 2730, the COBRA Subsidy Extension and Enhancement Act.

As you may know, COBRA allows jobless workers to keep their health care as they look for new work. The Recovery Act included a COBRA subsidy through the end of this year, but if we fail to act, millions of Americans currently looking for work will be faced with a further unbearable burden—the tripling of their COBRA payments.

I am very pleased with the Senate Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that was released yesterday. This bill will help bring down health care costs for families and the Federal Government. We will invest in prevention and provide incentives to doctors to provide high-quality health care. I commend Leader REID, Chairman HARKIN, Chairman BAUCUS, and Chairman DODD for moving us one critical step

closer to secure, affordable health care for all Americans. But while health care reform will bring long-term relief, the proposed COBRA extension will help us bridge the gap before health care reform is fully implemented.

Take, for example, the situation of one of my constituents, Gregory, from Lakeville, MN, southeast of the Twin Cities. Gregory has built a professional career in the printing industry, the same industry my dad was in. He was a printing salesman for 30 years. The printing industry has been especially hard hit by our current recession. Gregory's wife depends on him for health insurance. She has rheumatoid arthritis. My mom had rheumatoid arthritis. Gregory also has two daughters in school.

Gregory was laid off this March and has been tirelessly looking for a job ever since. But there aren't any jobs to be found. Now he has accepted that he may have to change fields, but he is 57 years old. A career change at 57 isn't easy. Unless Congress passes a COBRA extension, his premiums will nearly triple, going from \$350 a month to \$940 a month. In today's dismal economy, who has \$940 each month to spend on health care insurance, especially if you don't have a job?

Gregory has explored the option of a private insurance plan, but his wife's preexisting rheumatoid arthritis makes private plans an impossibility. Gregory is hopeful, as am I, that passing a health care reform bill will eliminate this problem of preexisting conditions. But in the meantime, what are families like Gregory's supposed to do?

Gregory's family is not alone in this plight. CBO estimates that 7 million workers and their families have used the COBRA subsidies in 2009. That includes thousands and thousands of Minnesotans. The expiration of the subsidy will make premiums so expensive that many families will be forced to drop their coverage, adding further to the number of uninsured Americans. Now is not the time to put another burden on struggling families.

The COBRA Subsidy Extension and Enhancement Act will provide relief to families by extending the COBRA subsidy another 6 months, through June of 2010. By that time, our economy will have made significant progress in job creation, and many Americans will be back on the job. The extension will also include an increase in the subsidy—from 65 percent to 75 percent—allowing more families to retain coverage. During this recession, the last thing Congress should do is pull the plug on benefits before folks have had a chance to get back on their feet.

I know my colleagues Senators BROWN and CASEY share the same goal of passing meaningful health care reform this year. But they also know the importance of providing a stopgap measure to deliver relief to families who are struggling in the current downturn. I thank them for their leadership on these critical issues.

I urge my colleagues to swiftly enact the COBRA Subsidy Extension and Enhancement Act and allow more families to maintain health care insurance coverage as they look for work.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS BILLS

Mr. COCHRAN. Madam President, in the coming weeks and months, the Senate is scheduled to complete action on bills that will have a profound impact on Federal spending for many years to come. I rise to express my concerns about the manner in which new spending is being proposed in that legislation.

Congress has sent 5 of the 12 annual appropriations bills to the President for his signature. Four other bills are in conference with the House. The Senate has not yet acted upon the three remaining bills under our jurisdiction.

Last year, Congress completely abandoned the appropriations process. The year before that, only a few bills were acted upon by the Senate before all of the bills but one were bundled into an omnibus bill and sent to the President.

Thus far this year, we have not been able to complete action on all 12 appropriations bills, but we have made significant progress. The Senate has debated a stand-alone Agriculture appropriations bill and an Interior appropriations bill for the first time in 4 years. Ideally, these bills should be subjected to the scrutiny of the full Senate every year. This year, there have been hearings in each subcommittee, and the bills have been subjected to subcommittee and full committee markups. We have tried to get the bills to the floor individually so all Senators have an opportunity to offer amendments, and so we can avoid the necessity of grouping the bills into an omnibus bill.

The chairman, who is the distinguished Senator from Hawaii, Mr. INOUE, deserves the credit for these improvements. All Senators on the committee have cooperated, though.

Despite the many difficulties associated with enacting the appropriations bills, the process compels us to hear testimony, analyze programs, and consider funding needs and priorities on an annual basis. It is not always a smooth or easy process, but it has the benefit of compelling us to continually re-evaluate the level of Federal spending. That is not the case when we create long-term or permanent mandatory spending programs.

I don't mean to criticize the oversight of the authorizing committees. Many of them do excellent work in this regard, holding agencies and funding recipients accountable for their management decisions. But once a funding stream is made mandatory, it is difficult to reduce or cut off the spending or to use the leverage of future funding to motivate more efficient management of Federal programs or activities.