

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I remind our Republican colleagues that the President will be meeting with us at noon. We look forward to seeing him. He is, of course, always welcome here. I am sure we will have a lively discussion.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to say a word about the administration's health care plan. Along with most Americans, the entire Republican conference opposed this legislation. We listened to the public and argued strenuously against its passage at every opportunity.

We also offered detailed reasons for our opposition, along with commonsense alternative reforms aimed at lowering the cost of health care without undermining the system we already have.

Since its passage, our arguments against the bill have been repeatedly vindicated, even as the administration's many promises about the bill have been called into question again and again. So Democrats may have passed this bill, but the debate is far from over. It is important that Americans know the ways in which the promises they heard aren't adding up.

The supporters of the bill said it would lower costs for families, taxpayers and small businesses and that the President would not support any plan that "adds one dime to the deficit."

As it turned out, Medicare's own experts say the bill will actually increase costs by more than \$300 billion.

The pricetag Democrats used to sell the bill is dramatically lower than the revised estimates that are now coming in. Sometime in the next several days, Democrats in Congress plan to add tens of billions of dollars more in health care spending on top of that, which, if they had been honest about it, would have been included in the original bill.

Needless to say, all this extra spending is money we don't have, and it goes straight to the deficit.

Take all this together, and it is no wonder that an overwhelming majority of Americans continue to oppose this new law.

Tomorrow, Senator BARRASSO will be on the floor offering what he calls a second opinion on the bill. This is an important effort that I think deserves and will continue to receive considerable attention. Dr. BARRASSO is holding the supporters of the bill accountable for the assurances they gave the American people, who deserve to know the real effects and the real impact of this bill.

Related to all this, of course, are the methods the administration and its allies in Congress used to pass the bill. The cornhusker kickback may be a household phrase, but it is just one of the questionable methods that were

used to force it through against the will of the public.

Another method was the stifling of critics, as was done by the Department of Health and Human Services.

I have spoken out repeatedly on the gag order HHS issued against private companies for doing nothing more than informing seniors about provisions of the bill that could affect their benefits.

Well, now you can add another layer of outrage to that unfortunate chapter in this debate because, just yesterday, I came across a recent flyer from the Department of Health and Human Services, which I am holding up, that does the very thing the administration didn't want private companies to do. They sent out a gag order against private companies saying you cannot express yourself about how this law would affect your beneficiaries. Now the government, at taxpayer's expense, is sending out—with our tax money—exactly the same thing to seniors that they would not let a private company do.

This flyer purports to inform seniors about what the health care bill would mean for them. Much of it directly contradicts what the administration's own experts have said about the law. This flyer—printed at taxpayers' expense and distributed to seniors—contradicts what the administration's own experts are saying about the health care bill. All this, as I said earlier, is bought and paid for by the American taxpayer.

This is a complete outrage. It is an absolute outrage. It is precisely the kind of thing that Americans are so angry about at the moment.

Here is the Federal Government telling a private business it can't communicate with its clients about important legislation and then doing the very same thing itself, paid for with our tax money.

The administration's own Actuary at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services says seniors who use Medicare Advantage will lose benefits as a result of this bill. Yet the flyer they are putting out says absolutely nothing about that. Instead, it implies that nothing will change for seniors.

But perhaps most egregious is the claim that a bill which cuts Medicare by \$½ trillion will actually "preserve and strengthen" Medicare. What nonsense.

This is nothing short of government propaganda, paid for by the taxpayer. I am sure Dr. BARRASSO will have more to say about this in the weeks ahead.

I commend to my colleagues a brochure that was put out by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the message therein by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius—"Medicare and the New Health Care Law—What it Means for You."

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate began consideration

of the supplemental spending bill to fund the surge of forces into Afghanistan and our ongoing efforts in Iraq.

President Karzai was recently here to talk about the situation in Afghanistan, and during that same week General McChrystal briefed the Armed Services Committee on the conduct of the overall campaign.

One message that came through from both visits is that the surge in Afghanistan is not yet complete and the counterinsurgency strategy General McChrystal has developed is still in its early stages. So it is impossible to overstate the importance of supporting our troops in the field.

In the coming year, the resolve of NATO forces in Afghanistan will be tested by the Taliban fighters. The Taliban leadership in Pakistan will be watching with interest to see if this Congress and our country stand firmly behind the counterinsurgency strategy and so will our Pakistani partners, elected governments in European capitals, and average citizens in Afghanistan.

Low-level Taliban fighters in Afghanistan will ultimately have to decide whether to side with a government that has yet to earn their trust or Taliban leaders. They will be watching our efforts as they weigh whether to side with the Taliban leaders or their current government in this fight. This is why we must keep up the pressure.

The stakes are as high as ever. We have seen that in recent weeks as the Pakistani Taliban has attempted to strike us here at home and as the Afghan Taliban has launched high visibility strikes at military installations in Kandahar and at Bagram. Afghan leaders who attend the coming peace talks will be waiting to see if the United States can be trusted to stay long enough to fulfill our promises of helping the security forces of Afghanistan become operationally effective.

American forces have brought great pressure on the Taliban in Afghanistan. That must continue if General McChrystal's strategy is to succeed. We must work together to help him ensure that the Taliban do not return to power in Afghanistan and that Afghanistan does not again become a sanctuary for terrorists.

In short, we must pass this bill with bipartisan support and resist the urge to slow it down or to use it as a mere vehicle for deficit spending on pet domestic projects that will only bog us down in a partisan fight.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.