

believe it is a good plan or why would you write it—then bring it out here. We have to have the debate. We have amendments. We are committed to making sure there is good patient protection legislation passed by this Senate. We are ready for the debate.

We would love to debate a plan that covers only one-third of the Americans in our country. We would love to debate a plan that does not assure a family with a child who is gravely ill that that child will have access to the best care available, to the best care that is there. We would love to debate that plan. We would love to debate a plan that does not provide consumers with a real choice to be able to go out and get the very best care they need for their loved ones. We would love to debate a plan that does not give consumers the right to really challenge some of these bean counters, some of these managed care plans owned by these large insurance industries. We would love to debate the "Republican Insurance Company Protection Plan" versus our patient protection plan.

But, again, I am on the floor, and now another speech has been given; but I have nobody to debate. I asked if anyone wanted to yield for questions. They do not want to yield for questions. Let's debate this. It will not be a bitter debate. It will not be a debate with hatred. But you know what. It is going to be serious. It is a pretty important question for families in our country. It is pretty important to people.

In case anybody has not noticed—I imagine every Senator has; all you have to do is spend 1 minute in your State—people are really getting fed up with this. They do not much like the way in which the insurance industry dominates health care. They do not much like the fact that they believe they have just been left out of the loop. You know what else. The caregivers—the doctors and nurses—feel the same way.

It is time that we pass legislation with teeth. The Republican plan, the "Insurance Company Protection Plan," pretends that it is a patient protection act. It is full of loopholes. It is Swiss cheese legislation. It is hard to defend it.

I can understand why my colleagues do not want to defend it. I can understand why they do not want to debate. I can understand why they have blocked our efforts, so far, to bring patient protection legislation to the floor. But I am telling you something: People in the country are demanding that we pass this legislation.

We are on a mission. The Democrats are on a mission. We are going to bring these amendments to the floor. We are going to insist there be a good, strong, honest debate; and we are going to do well by the people we represent.

I would be pleased to debate anybody, but in the absence of anyone to debate, I yield the floor.

Mr. BINGAMAN addressed the Chair. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I want to speak for just a few minutes.

What is the status of business in the Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico should be informed we are in morning business and there are 4 minutes remaining under the control of the Democratic side.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Robert Mendoza, a fellow in my office, be granted floor privileges during my remarks.

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

Mr. BINGAMAN. I would like to use those 4 minutes to say a few things about the Patients' Bill of Rights and the importance of the issue to a great many people in my State and around the country.

I think it is clear, from surveys I have seen, the American people want reform of this system of managed care and health maintenance organizations. There are a great many instances that have been called to our attention in our home States. I have heard of them in New Mexico, where people think the quality of care and the adequacy of care they are being provided with is not what it should be.

Without passage of some type of meaningful managed care reform, critical health care services will continue to be denied to many of the people we represent. One of the issues I believe is very important is what is referred to as provider nondiscrimination. We need a managed care health system that does not permit health plans to leave out nonphysician providers. I am talking about groups of health care providers such as nurse practitioners, psychologists, nurse midwives, leaving those people out of the network so that patients of these health maintenance organizations, customers of these health maintenance organizations are denied the ability to obtain their health care from those types of individuals.

In New Mexico, this is a critical concern. We have a shortage of physicians in our State. It is, in many parts of our State, very difficult to get health care, if you are required by your HMO to obtain that health care through a physician.

What we would like to do as part of the bill, which we hope to get to vote on in the next week or so, is to ensure that health maintenance organizations, where these people are qualified and certified, permit nonphysician health care providers to participate in these networks.

This is a critical concern in my State. I am sure it is a critical concern in many States.

Another issue that clearly needs to be addressed here is access to special-

ists. That is an issue I know came up when we had the debate in the Health and Education Committee. An amendment was offered to correct that. I believe Senator HARKIN offered that amendment; it was not successful. I believe it is a very important issue that needs to be revisited on the Senate floor.

There are many people who need the care of a specialist. Whether it is a pediatrician, whether it is an oncologist, whatever the specialty is, those people should not have to go through a family practitioner prior to going to that specialist. We would try to correct that in the legislation as well.

There are many other concerns we have with the bill that came out of the Health and Education Committee. I hope very much we get a full debate in the Senate on the deficiencies of that bill. I hope we get a chance to amend that bill.

The American people have been anxious to see reform in this area now for two Congresses that I am aware of. I think for us to continue to delay and put off and evade this issue is not the responsible course for us to follow. Our constituents, the people we represent in our States, expect better of us.

The people I represent in New Mexico expect me to do something about these very real problems they believe exist. In New Mexico, under the Republican bill that was reported out of the Health and Education Committee, there are almost 700,000 people who will not have substantive protections. In my State, there are 350,000 people who will not be covered at all if we pass the bill that came out of committee.

Mr. President, I see my time is up. I appreciate the opportunity to make comments, and I yield the floor.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to extend morning business for 15 minutes under the previous conditions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHANGE OF VOTE

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, yesterday on vote No. 180, which was the State Department authorization bill, in that legislation was \$819 million in U.N. back payments that the United States would pay to the U.N. In addition, there was \$107 million the U.N. owed to the United States that was forgiven.

I was unaware that those provisions were in the legislation, and I voted yea.