

11, that is bankruptcy protection but it is bankruptcy nonetheless. This is the second nursing home chain to file for bankruptcy in the last 2 months. These two nursing home chains own hundreds of facilities over the country, across it from north to south and east to west. So every Senator should be concerned about what is happening in this industry.

Frankly, we could have avoided this crisis if the administration had been more willing to acknowledge and address the problem. We wrote a bipartisan letter to Secretary Shalala in May, signed by 64 Senators, urging her to work with us to address the problem administratively. We have yet to get a response. Now I am here to tell you unless something very dramatic is done, this crisis is not over. We are going to see more bankruptcies and ultimately disruptions in the care for our senior citizens unless we fix this problem.

Clearly, one of the major reasons for these failures is the new payment system through the Medicare program for skilled nursing facilities and some of the services they give to their patients. Everyone, including the Health Care Financing Administration, acknowledges that this payment system does not adequately reimburse nursing homes for so-called nontherapy ancillary services; that is, drugs, oxygen, and other costs incurred, which are a very large part of the expenses of taking care of our seniors in nursing homes.

To address this problem, I joined with Senator HATCH and others in introducing S. 1500. That would fix the new payment system and it is fiscally responsible.

Unfortunately, the package of Medicare provisions released by the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Finance Committee yesterday is woefully inadequate.

Hatch-Domenici increased the payment rates in the 15 categories of reimbursement that clearly underpay for those patients with high non-therapy ancillary costs.

The Finance Committee package, however, only includes two of these 15 categories.

I am told that this is the position that HCFA supports, perhaps based on a contractor's analysis of the problem.

But I am also told that the same contractor indicates right up front in the report that patients with high non-therapy ancillary costs are likely to appear in the patient categories covered by the Hatch-Domenici bill.

But, it seems to me that there is no higher priority in Medicare than fixing this problem, which is on the verge of disrupting care for millions of seniors in every state.

The Finance Committee is working on a bill to help in this area and some others. I have seen the bill as of yesterday. It is totally inadequate to take

care of this problem, this crisis across this land. In my State, if this company goes bankrupt, totally bankrupt, it will not only hurt seniors across this land but we will have 700 to 800 people who will lose their jobs. They have been working in this industry for years.

I ask the Finance Committee to reconsider what they contemplated yesterday. I will begin working with some of them, with specifics. But I guarantee those who are contemplating a bill to do some justice and fairness in this area, we are not going to get by with the provisions that were in the bill as of yesterday.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, October 13, 1999, the Federal debt stood at \$5,662,720,361,489.64 (Five trillion, six hundred sixty-two billion, seven hundred twenty million, three hundred sixty-one thousand, four hundred eighty-nine dollars and sixty-four cents).

One year ago, October 13, 1998, the Federal debt stood at \$5,537,721,000,000 (Five trillion, five hundred thirty-seven billion, seven hundred twenty-one million).

Five years ago, October 13, 1994, the Federal debt stood at \$4,690,874,000,000 (Four trillion, six hundred ninety billion, eight hundred seventy-four million).

Ten years ago, October 13, 1989, the Federal debt stood at \$2,869,041,000,000 (Two trillion, eight hundred sixty-nine billion, forty-one million) which reflects a doubling of the debt—an increase of almost \$3 trillion—\$2,793,679,361,489.64 (Two trillion, seven hundred ninety-three billion, six hundred seventy-nine million, three hundred sixty-one thousand, four hundred eighty-nine dollars and sixty-four cents) during the past 10 years.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message from the President of the United States was communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate a message from the President of the United States submitting a nomination which was referred to the Committee on Finance.

(The nomination received today is printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 12:15 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks,

announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1993. An act to reauthorize the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the Trade and Development Agency, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the House has agreed to the following concurrent resolution, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H. Con. Res. 141. Concurrent resolution celebrating One America.

The message further announced that the House has agreed to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill, H.R. 2684, making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 6:09 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bill:

H.R. 2561. An act making appropriations for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes.

The enrolled bill was signed subsequently by the President pro tempore (Mr. THURMOND).

At 6:22 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 2990. An Act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow individuals greater access to health insurance through a health care tax deduction, a long-term care deduction, and other health-related tax incentives, to amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 to provide access to and choice in health care through association health plans to amend the Public Health Service Act to create new pooling opportunities for small employers to obtain greater access to health coverage through HealthMarts; to amend title I of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act, and the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to protect consumers in managed care plans and other health coverage; and for other purposes.

At 6:37 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 3064. An act making appropriations for the government of the District of Columbia and other activities chargeable in whole or in part against revenues of said District for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes.