

so they can take advantage of the benefits of competition in the telecommunications world, just as businesses can do on a very regular basis.

Therefore, the Phone Bill Fairness Act tries to do this by the following:

First, we require all telephone companies to accurately describe charges that appear on bills. No one should be able to misidentify so-called line items, especially by claiming they are "federally mandated" when they are not federally mandated.

Secondly, our bill would require all telephone companies to tell their customers exactly what their average per-minute rate is for a month, so they can compare it to the rates of other companies. Is that so strange? Not at all. When a customer goes to a supermarket, they can look at unit prices for groceries and, thus, they can shop and compare. That allows them to buy what is best for them in terms of what they want, in terms of price and quality, and that is competition. Why can't we do this for telephone customers? The answer is, of course, we can.

Thirdly, we would require that all telephone companies inform customers of their calling patterns in an understandable way. If customers know what they are paying and know what types of calls are most frequent, they will then be able to compare all of the different company plans and find the one that is right for them. Again, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was about competition. This bill is about competition.

Finally, the bill gives the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission the power to explore how to make phone bills easier to read so that we don't do it here in Congress, and to determine whether any telephone companies are committing fraud in their billing practices. I don't mean to suggest this is the common practice, but there are some small phone companies that do something called "slamming," and that is fraud. They charge people for things they have not, in fact, signed up for. That is fraud. The best defense against fraud is an informed consumer. Consumers cannot be well-informed if they do not understand their phone bills. So this is all fairly logical and straightforward and, I think, in the interest of the Telecommunications Act and, more important, of the American people.

Consumers are terribly frustrated with how confusing phone bills are today. When consumers get frustrated, they assume the worst. I believe we have an obligation to try to do something about all of this, and I believe we can. I still very much believe in the Telecommunications Act. I voted for it and participated in shaping it. I believe in the benefits of competition, but we need to make sure the benefits of competition reach everybody in the coun-

try—business consumers, residential consumers, and everybody. The first step to achieving this goal is making sure every consumer not only has the opportunity to get better rates and services but that they also have the knowledge and the power to actually get what they want at the lowest price.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KYL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

Mr. DASCHLE. I thank the Chair.

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE ACT OF 1999

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, today I am introducing the President's new proposal entitled the Strengthen Social Security and Medicare Act of 1999. I send it to the desk.

It lays out steps we need to take to protect Social Security and Medicare for future generations. It has a number of key provisions that I will enumerate.

I look forward to the time in the not too distant future when I will come back with a number of our colleagues to talk at greater length about the importance of this bill and what it includes. It devotes the entire Social Security surplus to debt reduction. That is one of the most important features of the bill.

We recognize how critical it is that we ensure the viability of the trust fund for as long as we can. We also recognize it isn't mutually exclusive to want to extend the viability of the trust fund and pay off the public debt at the same time.

Therefore, what this legislation will do is first pay off all of the public debt. It will eliminate the publicly held debt by the year 2015, reducing the debt by \$3.1 trillion over the next 15 years.

It then devotes the entire savings, which otherwise would have been spent on the interest on that debt, to the Social Security trust funds. The real savings generated in the year 2011 alone, according to the Office of Management and Budget, will be \$107 billion.

This is a remarkable bill and one of which I am very excited to introduce. First, we pay off the debt; second, we dedicate to Social Security the interest that would otherwise have been going to pay interest on the debt. We not only have eliminated the public debt, we have lengthened the viability of the trust fund.

The President's plan extends the life of the trust fund in this manner by al-

most 20 additional years, to the year 2050. This extension of solvency is not conjecture. It is not something we wish will happen under this plan. Independent Social Security actuaries have confirmed this plan extends the solvency of the Social Security trust fund until the year 2050.

What a remarkable accomplishment. First, we will have paid off the publicly held debt; second, we will have extended solvency by 16 years.

We also do something else with this legislation. Obviously, it is important to extend solvency. But if the program is not reformed, we have not done enough. There are things we can do to strengthen and modernize another aspect of the entire retirement infrastructure we have in place today. That infrastructure has three legs: Social Security, Medicare, and private insurance, or retirement plans.

We will address private retirement issues in other legislation.

This bill addresses the two main governmental pillars of Social Security retirement: Social Security and Medicare.

It creates a real lockbox to further protect the trust funds both for Social Security and Medicare by extending the budget enforcement rules, including pay-as-you-go budget requirements from here on out.

There have been a number of debates on the Senate floor, and we talked in recent weeks about whether or not we are ever going to enact a lockbox. Unfortunately, the majority leader has chosen to fill the amendment tree—that is to preclude Democratic amendments in the debate on the lockbox; that has precluded our ability entirely to offer an amendment which says we ought not only lock up the Social Security trust fund, we ought to lock up the Medicare trust fund, too, because it, too, is a trust fund upon which our seniors depend.

This legislation includes a long-supported lockbox, but it also contains no trap door. The Republican version contained a trap door that allowed Social Security surpluses to be used for any purpose, including tax cuts, that could be labeled as Social Security reform.

There it is. In addition to ensuring we pay down the debt, in addition to ensuring we provide for 16 additional years of solvency, this bill provides a real lockbox without a trap door for Social Security and for Medicare.

I think it is important we set the record straight when it comes to this proposal. This has been the product of an extraordinary amount of work within the White House, within the administration, working with Democrats in Congress.

Republicans claim they have found religion when it comes to Social Security. The CBO clarified what is happening right now on Social Security with the letter provided yesterday.

They said if the budget and the appropriations bills pass as are now contemplated and as are now drafted, we will be using \$17.1 billion of Social Security trust funds. Those aren't our words; those are the words of the Congressional Budget Office. They said if we were going to offset the need to use Social Security trust funds, we would have to cut across the board 4.8 percent to accommodate the increases in investments and spending across the board in the 13 appropriations bills.

There shouldn't be any doubt about who it is that is drawing down the Social Security trust fund this year before we even have a lockbox, before we even have real Social Security and Medicare reform. That is why this legislation is necessary. We have a rare opportunity to extend the life and the solvency of Social Security and Medicare, to pay off the publicly held debt in 15 years, and to provide meaningful reform to both Social Security and Medicare in a way that will absolutely guarantee that baby boomers, when they retire, will be able to count on Social Security and on Medicare in a debt-free country.

It doesn't get much better than that as a goal, as a set of proposals. I am hopeful in this Congress before the adjournment date next session this legislation will become the focus of a good debate. This legislation will be not only considered but given an opportunity for a good vote, an opportunity for careful consideration. Let it be amended if it be the will of the Senate, but let's debate it. Let's get on with it. Let's commit it to law. Let's send a clear message to the American people, we as Republicans and Democrats, and support eliminating the public debt. We support extending the solvency and the viability of both the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. We can do that with the bill we are introducing today, and I hope it is done.

Mr. REID. Will the leader yield for a brief question?

Mr. DASCHLE. I am happy to yield to the assistant Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. I listened intently to the leader's statement. I ask the leader if it is somewhat startling, amusing—whatever word we want to use—that the majority, the Republicans, did not support Social Security when it was adopted in the 1930s; the Senator is aware of that?

Mr. DASCHLE. The Senator from Nevada is correct. To my knowledge, it was not supported by Republicans—I don't know if I am in a position to say unanimously, but overwhelmingly.

Mr. REID. We do know they filed in this body the motion to recommit, saying they wanted to get rid of it once and for all.

Mr. DASCHLE. The Senator is correct.

Mr. REID. It is also true when Medicare was adopted, that was a Demo-

cratic program. There was some support from the Republicans, but not very much?

Mr. DASCHLE. The Senator is correct.

Mr. REID. The Senator is also aware in recent years, under the leadership of Newt Gingrich, the House Republican leadership spoke out in opposition to Medicare and Social Security? Is the Senator aware of that?

Mr. DASCHLE. The Senator from Nevada is correct. I think the words were, "We want to see it wither on the vine."

Mr. REID. And the present majority leader of the House said he thought Social Security was a "rotten idea." Is the Senator aware of that?

Mr. DASCHLE. That is how he has been quoted. That is correct.

Mr. REID. I further say it was just a few years ago when the Senator from South Dakota joined a number of us on the floor in opposing a constitutional amendment to balance the budget which used Social Security surpluses to balance that budget. Is the Senator aware of that?

Mr. DASCHLE. The Senator is right. In fact, he was a very important part of that whole effort.

Mr. REID. In short, I say to the Senator, and I think the Senator would agree, it is great, now that the Republicans, the majority, who have been opposed to Social Security, opposed to Medicare in years gone by, suddenly, in effect, have found religion and now they want to do something to support Medicare and to extend the solvency of Social Security; isn't it good?

I know you would agree with that. But I say to the Senator from South Dakota, I think it is important that you, in effect, have challenged them to come forward in a bipartisan fashion to debate these proposals the Senator has outlined for the good of the country, to extend Social Security and preserve Medicare. Is that, in effect, what the Senator is saying?

Mr. DASCHLE. That is exactly what I am saying. I think it is important for us to depoliticize the issue to ensure we find ways to address meaningful reform that will pass and will be signed into law.

I am concerned. The Senator from Nevada mentioned "getting religion." I am concerned that, while it is important to have religion, it is important to follow the practices of religion—if this is how we are going to characterize this new-found sensitivity to Social Security and Medicare—the facts do not comport with the current expressions of devotion to Social Security. The facts are, the Republican budget raids the Social Security trust fund by \$17 billion, as was indicated, again, yesterday in the letter from the Congressional Budget Office.

The facts indicate that there is a trap door in the lockbox proposed by Republicans that would actually allow

any proposal to draw on the Social Security surplus, so long as you call it Social Security reform. You could call a tax cut Social Security reform, and it would qualify under the lockbox proposal made by our Republican colleagues. Call it reform and it opens the lockbox. That is the key.

We used to have skeleton keys when I was young. The Republican lockbox has a skeleton key that would fit in any door. We need to get rid of these skeleton keys. We need to get on with real lockbox reform. We need to lock up Medicare as well; we need to make sure we are not going to use the \$17 billion of trust fund money currently included in this budget. We need to do that and that is what this proposal will do today.

Mr. REID. Will the Senator yield for one brief question, based on the statement the Senator just made?

We had, yesterday, a number of Senators from the minority making the case we were unable to bring matters to the floor—Patients' Bill of Rights, minimum wage—all the things we have talked about in the last several months and have not had the opportunity to, in effect, debate. The junior Senator from Illinois came forward and said he thought it was too bad the minority would not allow a vote on the lockbox.

I say to the Democratic leader, isn't it true that we were happy to have a vote on the lockbox; all we wanted was to have our lockbox and their lockbox and vote on both of them? Isn't that what it was all about?

Mr. DASCHLE. The Senator makes a very important point for the record, and we ought to make it daily. They are turning facts on their head. The accusation is the Democrats won't allow a vote on the lockbox. What is really true is we are not allowed a vote on our own amendment when it comes to the lockbox. Our view is, it is important if we are going to have a debate on the lockbox that we all have the opportunity to offer amendments. You cannot have a meaningful debate without a meaningful opportunity to offer amendments. That is all we are protesting. Certainly, the Republican majority can understand that.

Mr. REID. I thank my colleague.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

Mr. DASCHLE. I thank the Chair.

ENERGY SECURITY TAX ACT OF 1999

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, for the last 2 years I have been working closely with a number of my colleagues to develop a package of tax incentives to foster domestic energy alternatives and thus help reduce our growing dependence on imported oil. Along with those colleagues, I am pleased today to introduce the Energy Security Tax Act of 1999, and I am hopeful that Congress