

that suffer from the "senior citizens' drug penalty"—the high prices our nation's seniors are forced to pay for prescription drugs.

The amendment that I've offered would force Congress to address these priorities. It simply says that the tax bill before the Senate today won't take effect until Congress has also fulfilled its responsibility to enact a meaningful Medicare prescription drug benefit. My amendment won't prevent Congress from enacting marriage penalty relief this year, nor will it keep a single married couple from enjoying the tax benefits in this bill. What it will do is ensure that we don't backtrack from the Senate's vote to enact a prescription drug benefit before we do major tax cuts.

Let me say, Mr. President, that this isn't just rhetoric. The problems faced by our nation's seniors in affording prescription drugs are immediate and real. I'd like to remind the Senate of a story I heard from a physician in my state recently about a patient who was splitting her doses of Tamoxifen—a breast cancer drug—with two of her friends who also had breast cancer, but couldn't afford the medication. As a result, all three women had inadequate doses of the medication.

Or consider the story of a disabled father of three from Pennington Gap, Virginia, who broke his neck several years ago, and went from making \$50,000 a year to \$800 a month in disability benefits. While he qualifies for Medicare, he's forced to choose each month between spending nearly half of his disability benefit on prescription drugs, or helping out his family, because Medicare offers no coverage for his medications.

These Virginians are not alone in their troubles. The average Medicare beneficiary will spend \$1100 on prescription drugs this year. Most of them won't have adequate prescription drug coverage to help them cover these crushing costs. And the numbers of those that do have coverage are dropping rapidly.

Despite the suggestions of some of my colleagues, this problem isn't limited solely to the poor. One in four Medicare beneficiaries with a high income—defined as \$45,000 a year for a couple—has no coverage for prescription drugs. And while some seniors do have coverage, nearly half of them lack coverage for the entire year, making them extremely vulnerable to catastrophic drug costs.

Complicating this matter for the elderly is the "senior citizens' drug penalty" that seniors without drug coverage are forced to pay. Most working Americans who are insured through the private sector pay less than the full retail price for prescription drugs. This is because insurers generally contract with private sector entities that negotiate better prices for drugs, and pass

on the power of group purchasing to their customers.

Seniors lack this option, however, and must still pay full price for their drugs. One recent study showed that seniors without drug coverage typically pay 15 percent more than people with coverage. And the percentage of Medicare beneficiaries without drug coverage who report not being able to afford a needed drug is about 5 times higher than those with coverage.

This "senior citizens' drug penalty," in my view, is unconscionable. Senior citizens are more reliant on drugs, and have higher drug costs, than any other segment of the population. They deserve to have the same bargaining power that benefits other Americans.

Mr. President, in April, the other side spoke against my budget amendment, claiming that there was already adequate language in the Republican budget resolution to ensure that we pass a prescription drug benefit this year. At the time, they pointed to the \$40 billion reserve fund which was included in the budget resolution that the Committee had reported, arguing that this would provide ample money to enact a prescription drug benefit and offer tax relief.

Republicans asked, in essence, that we trust them that the Senate won't put tax cuts before our nation's seniors. Let me say that I do trust my good friends on the other side of the aisle. But to borrow a line from Ronald Reagan, I believe we should trust—but verify. That requires deeds as well as words.

Mr. President, our nation's seniors deserve better than this. In April, at least fifty-one senators felt the same way. I urge every one of them, as well as senators who opposed my amendment then because they thought the \$40 billion reserve fund would guarantee a prescription drug benefit, to support my amendment now. With its passage, we'll be able to eliminate both the true "marriage penalty" and the "senior citizens' drug penalty."

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine is recognized.

Ms. COLLINS. I believe under the previous order I will be recognized to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized for 15 minutes.

CONCERN FOR SENATOR PAUL COVERDELL

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I want to express the sorrow that is in my heart, and I know in the hearts of all of my colleagues and, indeed, everybody who works in the Senate, about the sad news of the unexpected ill health of our friend and colleague, Senator PAUL COVERDELL of Georgia. My heart and my prayers go out to him, his family,

his staff, his constituents, and all of the many people who care so much about our good friend. He will be in our hearts and in our prayers. I know I speak for all of my colleagues when I wish him a speedy recovery.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine is recognized.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS and Mr. CRAIG pertaining to the introduction of S. 2879 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2001

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the hour of 3 p.m. having arrived, the Senate will now resume consideration of H.R. 4578, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4578) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, we are now back for the final 3 and one-quarter hours of debate on amendments to the Interior appropriations bill. Any Member who reserved an amendment to that bill may present it between now and 6:15 this evening, at which time, by unanimous consent, we go to the marriage penalty bill for what may be an extended series of votes. Any of the amendments reserved on the Interior bill will be voted on, if, in fact, the vote is necessary, tomorrow morning.

I list 12 amendments that were reserved for debate during this period of time. I am informed by staff that we have settled 4 of them. That leaves eight amendments: two by the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. BINGAMAN; one by the Senator from California, Mrs. BOXER; one by the Senator from Nevada, Mr. BRYAN; one by the Senator from Connecticut, Mr. LIEBERMAN; one by the Senator from Oklahoma, Mr. NICKLES; one by the Senator from Rhode Island, Mr. REED; one by the Senator from Wyoming, Mr. THOMAS.

Curiously enough, most of these Senators who have said they will be here from between 5 o'clock and 6 o'clock p.m., which takes a considerable portion of the debate time, are away. I think some of those eight amendments I have listed will themselves be settled without debate or by agreement. If any of the seven Senators whose names I have just mentioned are within hearing and sight of this debate, I urge that