

tell you how many of my friends this affects. I am in that generation of baby boomers—slightly older, I might add—but in a generation where a frequent topic of conversation for my age group is how are your mom and dad doing? The stories come back, and some of them are heartbreaking, about Parkinson's and Alzheimer's and complications with diabetes that lead to amputations and people finally having to make the tough decision of asking their parents to consider living in a place where they can receive some assistance.

It is expensive. We, on the Democratic side, believe that helping to pay for those expenses the families endure because of aging parents is a good tax cut, one that is good for this country and good for the families. Not so on the Republican side. When we offered this, they voted against it. They would rather give estate tax relief to the wealthiest people.

How about child care? Everybody who got up this morning in America and headed to work and left a small child with a neighbor or at a day-care center understands that this is tugging at your mind constantly during the day. Is my child in safe hands? Is this a quality and positive environment for my child to be in? How much does it cost? Can we afford it? Can we do a little better?

We, on the Democratic side, think we ought to help these families. They are working families who should have peace of mind. Senator DODD offered an amendment that proposed tax credits, not only for day care, but also tax credits for stay-at-home moms who decide they are going to forgo working, to stay with the children and try to raise them. We want to help in both of those circumstances. We think those are the real problems facing America. The Republicans instead believe that estate tax relief for the superrich is much more important.

Expand the earned-income tax credit for the working poor, help families save for retirement, provide estate tax relief—particularly to make sure that a family-owned farm or a family-owned business can be passed on to the next generation. I think the estate tax needs reform. We support that. We voted for it. But we think the Republican proposal goes way too far in proposing we abolish it.

I see my time is coming to a close. We think the agenda before this Congress is an agenda of missed opportunities. The Republicans are in control in the House and Senate. They decide what will be considered on the floor, if anything. They have failed to bring forward commonsense gun safety legislation after Columbine, to try to keep guns out of the hands of kids and criminals. We passed it in the Senate with AL GORE's vote, sent it to the House—the gun lobby killed it. We lose

30,000 Americans every year to gun violence; 12 children every single day. For the Republicans, it is not a priority to bring this bill forward.

The Patients' Bill of Rights, so your doctor can make the call on your medical treatment or your family's medical treatment—most people think that is common sense. The insurance companies do not. They want their clerks to make the decision based on the bottom line of profit and loss. It is not a medical decision for them, it is a financial decision. And for a lot of families it is disastrous when they cannot get the appropriate care for their kids and their families. We think a Patients' Bill of Rights makes sense. The insurance lobby opposed it. The insurance lobby prevailed. The special interest groups won on the floor and we have gone nowhere with this proposal.

Minimum wage: \$5.15 an hour for a minimum wage that affects some 10 million workers across America. It is about time for a pay raise. These folks deserve to do better. It used to be bipartisan. We didn't even argue about it. Now the Republicans say: No, no no, we can't give a 50-cent-an-hour pay raise to people making \$5.15 an hour. Do you realize that 50 cents an hour comes out to, what, \$1,000 a year that we will give these people?

Yet we are going to turn around and give Donald Trump a \$400 million tax break on his estate? You cannot give working families a thousand bucks a year, but you can give the one of the superrich \$400 million tax relief? Is something upside-down in this Chamber? I think so.

Take a look at the prescription drug benefit. Ask Americans—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—the one thing we ought to do this year? A guaranteed universal prescription drug benefit under Medicare. The pharmaceutical companies oppose it. They are pretty powerful characters in this town. They have stopped this Senate and this House from considering it. Here we are, languishing, doing nothing, when it comes to a prescription drug benefit.

Finally, something for our schools. Seven million kids in America attend schools with serious safety code violations; 25,000 schools across our country are falling down. Are we going to be ready for the 21st century? Will our kids be ready? Will our workforce be ready? You can answer that question by deciding at this point in time whether education is truly a priority and, if it is such a priority, then for goodness' sakes we should invest more than 1 percent of our Federal budget in K-12 education. That is what we invest. The Democrats, under the leadership of Senator KENNEDY, believe that investment is overdue. We think that is what families in America are looking for, not for tax relief for the wealthiest among us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 2924 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I see that the Senate majority leader has come to the floor, so I yield to him. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. L. CHAFEE). The Senate majority leader.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Maine for her comments, her leadership on so many important issues in the Senate, and for yielding to me at this time so we may proceed.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, obviously I had hoped we would be making a lot more progress this week on appropriations bills and other issues. That has not transpired yet. But we have been filing cloture motions, and we will be getting votes. In some way we will deal this week with the Treasury-Postal Service appropriations bill. I hope we can find a way to proceed on the energy and water appropriations bill. We will get to a vote at some point on the intelligence authorization bill. So, hopefully, we can still go forward.

I do not feel as if we are proceeding appropriately, but in spite of that, I think it generally was interpreted or understood that I would try to begin the discussion on the China PNTR bill. Even though it will be difficult to get through the maze of clotures we have had to file this week, I still think it is the appropriate thing to do to begin this process because we do not know exactly how long it will take to get to a final vote on the China trade issue.

I am still going to do my best to find a way to have the Thompson-Torricelli legislation considered in some manner before we get to the substance of the China trade bill because I think Chinese nuclear weapons proliferation is a very serious matter. We should discuss that and have a vote on it. I think it would be preferable to do it aside from the trade bill itself.

In the end, if we can't get any other way to get at it, these two Senators may exercise their right to offer it to the China PNTR bill. But I am going to continue to try to find a way for that to be offered in another forum. I think Senator DASCHLE indicated he would work with us to try to see if we could find a way to do that. But I do think if we can go ahead and get started—and since there will be resistance to the motion to proceed—then we will file cloture and have a vote on it then on Friday.