

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG COVERAGE

Mr. CLELAND. Mr. President, prescription drugs currently constitute the largest out-of-pocket health care cost for seniors. Over 85 percent of Medicare beneficiaries take at least one prescription medicine, and the average senior fills eighteen prescriptions per year.

Because prescription drug coverage was not a standard part of health insurance when Medicare was enacted 35 years ago, many seniors must pay for the high cost of prescription drugs out of their own pockets. We are now facing a crisis of monumental proportion for many older Americans.

The simple fact is, the high cost of today's modern medicines and the absence of Medicare coverage have placed needed medications out of reach for too many seniors. Most older Americans must juggle daily costs like groceries and utilities with paying for medicine. They are being forced to compromise by buying only a portion of the needed medications, too often making their treatment regimens incorrect and ineffective. Without the proper medication and dosage for conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart problems, seniors may find themselves faced with even more costly hospitalizations and compromised health.

Recently, I received a letter from Reverend Lois Congdon of Decatur Georgia. Reverend Congdon wrote to me about her impending retirement. She told of her expensive drug treatment costs and the coverage she was currently receiving under her employer-based insurance plan. Without her current salary, and once she is placed on Medicare, Reverend Congdon will no longer be able to afford her expensive prescription drugs. Even supplemental prescription coverage such as medigap offers only limited benefits and is too expensive for most seniors. Currently only one-fourth of Medicare enrollees have supplemental drug insurance and the number of firms offering such coverage has declined by 25 percent in the last four years alone.

Last month, I cosponsored legislation to provide similar prescription drug coverage for military retirees. The bill would enable military retirees over age 65 to use the National mail order pharmacy program for drug coverage. However, affordable prescription drug coverage is a benefit that all seniors should be able to obtain, not just armed service men and women. Seniors make up 12 percent of our nation's population and they purchase over one-third of all prescription drugs in America. Most older Americans live on fixed incomes of \$15,000 a year which is adjusted slightly for inflation each year. However, for far too long, the rate of increase in prescription drug costs has exceeded the rate of inflation. This situation has created a need more urgent

than ever to strengthen the Medicare Program with a prescription drug plan, and thereby protect millions of American seniors from more costly hospitalizations and treatments.

Expanding Medicare by adding a prescription drug benefit will bring the program in line with the realities of modern medicine. Prescription drug coverage is essential to the delivery of 21st century medicine. These medicines keep people healthy, independent, and out of the hospital. To not include prescription benefits in Medicare today is akin to not including a major form of treatment such as a surgical procedure when Medicare was established in 1965. It is absolutely unthinkable. Too many seniors lack dependable drug coverage and their health is being compromised. I am committed to providing Medicare coverage for prescription drugs, and promise to continue fighting for America's seniors. The Congress must move forward expeditiously to adopt legislation to accomplish this important objective.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FITZGERALD). The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. ROTH. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. ROTH and Mr. MOYNIHAN pertaining to the introduction of S. 2277 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MEASURE READ THE FIRST TIME—S. 2284

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, I understand that S. 2284, introduced earlier today by Senator DASCHLE, and others, is at the desk, and I ask for its first reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill for the first time.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2284) to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. I thank the always generous clerk.

I now ask for its second reading and object to my own request on behalf of the other side.

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

Mr. MOYNIHAN. If the distinguished Chair understands that, he understands more than I do. But the matter is now concluded. Once again, I suggest the

absence of a quorum. And thank Heaven for Mr. Dove.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, what is the business before the Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in morning business.

Mr. GORTON. With any time limitations?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There are none.

PIPELINE SAFETY

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, last week the city of Bellingham was the site of a Senate field hearing on pipeline safety. This hearing comes after the unspeakable tragedy that took place when three young boys were killed after a gasoline pipeline exploded in Bellingham on June 10.

I want to share with you my thoughts from the hearing and outline future congressional action as the Senate Commerce Committee prepares to reauthorize the Office of Pipeline Safety this year.

Unfortunately, my Senate Commerce Committee colleagues were unable to attend last Monday's hearing in Bellingham, but I believe the committee has no greater priority than to making sure the pipelines running underneath our schools, neighborhoods, churches, and senior centers are safe.

Pipeline safety concerns aren't unique to Washington. We're seeing States such as Texas, Wisconsin, Florida, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania respond to various local pipeline issues from oil spills and leaks to siting battles. In the last decade, there were 3,917 liquid fuel spills and natural gas leaks, averaging roughly one per day. These accidents resulted in 201 deaths, close to 3,000 injuries and \$778 million in property damage. And for the first time, a National Pipeline Safety Conference will be held in Washington, D.C. next month.

Though the sacrifice is one that no family and no community should have to make, the tragedy in Bellingham would be even worse if we did not learn from it and apply those lessons to try to prevent other accidents. To this end, last week's hearing was invaluable.

While the cause of the explosion remains under investigation, here's what we do know:

We know that many people in Bellingham were unaware that a pipeline was even running through their neighborhood.

We know that the Office of Pipeline Safety ignored enhanced safety requirements, including increased inspections inside pipes, in highly populated