

this benefit. It is wrong for pharmacy benefits to be taken away for the sole reason that a retiree has reached the age of 65.

That is what happens at the present time. Once they turn 65, they go under the Medicare system. Under the Medicare system, there are no prescription drug benefits, which they had otherwise been receiving, so they are left out in the cold. This initiative lets all military retirees know that we have not forgotten them. It lets all of the service members know that if they dedicate their lives to the service of our country, we will take care of their health care needs from the pharmaceutical point of view.

Again, I express great appreciation to Senator WARNER and the others—Senator THURMOND and a number of our colleagues on the committee—particularly Senator SNOWE, who has taken great interest in this prescription drug issue. I think all of us know that the issue of prescription drugs is something of enormous concern to the elderly in this country. It was a benefit that was basically excluded from the coverage of Medicare when Medicare was passed in 1965.

In 1965, the private companies were trying to make Medicare effectively the same kind of benefit package that existed in the private sector. At that time, very few in the private sector had a prescription drug benefit. Today, we see that progress has been made in the private sector. Now, more than 95 percent of the private sector plans provide prescription drug coverage, but Medicare doesn't. That is part of the great debate that, hopefully, we will have in this body before we adjourn; that is, are we going to provide prescription drug benefits for our senior citizens?

What the Armed Services Committee, under the leadership of Senator WARNER, has said is that eligible retirees are going to have those health care needs met, and they do it in a way that makes prescription drugs accessible to them through a mail order and a direct retail system through Tricare. This is basically a nationwide system with only a 20-percent co-payment, no enrollment fee, and no deductible, which will make these prescription drugs accessible and affordable for people who are living in retirement in the armed services community.

I think this is enormously important. I think it is a great step forward. It is in response to the health care needs of men and women who have served this country, and I think it bodes very well for Congress as we try to work together to try to find ways of meeting the needs of others who are retired and need these prescription drugs desperately.

Mr. President, again, I thank Senator WARNER and others for their leadership and for this extremely important and significant step. It bodes well for this

institution, and it is an expression of great appreciation to the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces of our country. I hope that we can follow this precedent and come to grips with the challenges that exist for the elderly in our Nation, and that we are able to develop a prescription drug benefit for them, too, the way we have been able to do it for military retirees. I think that would be great work by this Congress, and there is very little reason that we cannot do it. We should do it. I look forward to working with my colleagues to make sure that it is done.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and 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. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

IN HONOR OF STEPHEN S.F. CHEN

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to honor Stephen S.F. Chen, who serves as the head of the Taipei Cultural and Economic Representative Office in Washington, DC.

Ambassador Chen will be retiring from diplomatic service and returning to his home in Taiwan soon. I have come to know Ambassador Chen well since his appointment in October of 1997, as have many of my colleagues, and hold him in high regard for his unquestioned professionalism and personal integrity.

Ambassador Chen has, for forty years, ably represented his government in posts throughout the world. His experience in the United States is extensive. During the past twenty-five years Ambassador Chen has served in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. Over the years, Ambassador Chen has become a friend to numerous Americans, myself included. It is fitting in many ways that he closes his diplomatic career here in Washington, among friends.

Mr. President, representing the people of Taiwan abroad is a challenge of great magnitude. The people of Taiwan live in an admirably democratic, free and dynamic community at home. They are significantly more constrained in the international community. Effectively communicating the interests of Taiwan abroad requires considerable diplomatic skill, patience and resolve. Stephen Chen embodies all these traits.

The people of Taiwan could not have had a better Ambassador in Washington, D.C., than Stephen Chen. I will certainly miss my good friend when he leaves and know my colleagues will join me in extending to him our best wishes and great appreciation.

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. GRASSLEY. 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. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as if in morning business for 7 minutes.

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

BUILDING CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, in 1968 the Congress of the United States passed the Wholesome Poultry Product Act of 1968.

A former Congressman from Iowa by the name of Neal Smith—Members of the present Congress will remember—was a person who served the people of Iowa very well and spent a considerable amount of time during his years in Congress trying to build consumer confidence in poultry and other meats American consumers buy.

In 1960, there were 1.8 billion chickens produced in the United States and consumed by the public. In 1998, it was up to 8 billion chickens. There has been a very dramatic rise in the consumption of chicken by the American consumer, all the more reason to make sure the Wholesome Poultry Products Act of 1968 is followed.

There is a dismal picture painted about the inspection of poultry slaughterhouses in the United States and some question about whether the meat consumed by the American public is as wholesome as the 1968 act intended. This question arises because of a proposal in the Department of Agriculture to shift some routine Federal inspection from Federal inspectors to inspectors hired by the poultry slaughtering companies. An article was in yesterday's Des Moines Register, by Register Washington reporter George Anthan, who has been reporting on the subject of wholesome inspection of meat by the Department of Agriculture for almost his entire journalistic career. George Anthan is very much an authority on both what was intended and the enforcement of that law.

Rather than summarizing, I will read what was reported yesterday in the Des Moines Register by George Anthan.

The Agriculture Department admits consumers may detest chicken or turkey that contains pus from a pneumonia-like disease called air sacculitis.

But the condition fails to threaten human health, federal officials say, and the issue of dealing with it can be left largely to the employees of meat processing companies, rather than to federal inspectors.