RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is my understanding we are in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If the Senator will suspend, we will lay down the orders.

Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business not to extend beyond the hour of 10:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 30 minutes each.

Under the previous order, there will now be 30 minutes under the control of the Senator from Illinois, Mr. DURBIN, or his designee.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Chair.

THIS WEEK’S AGENDA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am happy to be in the Chamber this morning to address the issues that are going to be considered before the Congress this week.

One of the most important issues that I found in my home State of Illinois, and I think can be found in virtually every State in the Union, is the prescription drug benefit under Medicare. They are telling us, the people who do this for a living, that when they ask families across America what is one of the major issues you are going to look to when it comes to electing the President of the United States or electing a Member of Congress, one of the major issues that comes forward is the prescription drug benefit. It is understandable because the Medicare program, as good as it is—in fact, it has been there for 40 years as the health insurance program for the elderly and disabled—does not have a prescription drug benefit. You would not buy a health insurance plan for your family today that didn’t include one because you never know when you are going to be subjected to an illness that a doctor says: I know just the thing; here is a prescription. They will find out they can’t afford to fill the prescription. So a lot of seniors on limited, fixed incomes, make a hard choice and say, may I not be able to take this prescription or maybe I will fill it and only take half. The net result, of course, is the senior doesn’t get well, doesn’t get strong. In fact, they can see their health deteriorate simply because they can’t afford to fill their prescriptions.

The irony, of course, is that if a senior can’t buy the drugs they need to stay healthy and they end up in the hospital, guess what. The taxpayers step in and say Medicare will pay for that. In other words, if someone gets sick because they don’t have prescription drugs, we will pay for it. If seniors have to go to the hospital, taxpayers pay for it.

We on the Democratic side believe that we need to do two things. We need to put a prescription drug benefit in the Medicare program, as well. Americans know and the disabled peace of mind that when they need these prescription drugs, they will have help in paying for them. That is something everyone expects from a health insurance plan. It should be the bottom line when it comes to Medicare, as well.

The Democratic side has been pushing this literally for years. We believe that is something this Congress should have done a long time ago. Sadly, we have had no cooperation, none whatever, from the Republican side of the aisle. They do not believe this is a critical and important issue. We have tried our very best to bring this issue to a vote on the floor. We have tried both in the House and the Senate. They have blocked us every single time.

Who would oppose a prescription drug benefit? On its face, why would anybody oppose that? It will help seniors. It will mean they will buy prescription drugs.

We have an obligation to create a prescription drug benefit program as well. Americans know and they should, but they also have an obligation to the people of the United States to price these drugs fairly.

We have an obligation to create a prescription drug benefit under Medicare, as well. Americans know and have had no cooperation, none whatever, from the Republican side of the aisle. They do not believe this is a critical and important issue. We have tried to bring this issue to a vote on the floor. We have tried both in the House and the Senate. They have blocked us every single time.

We on the Democratic side believe that we need a prescription drug benefit plan. We need to also address the question of pricing to make sure these drugs are affordable, so that the drug companies treat Americans at least as fairly as they treat Canadians. I don’t think that is unreasonable.

Many times, we taxpayers, through the National Institutes of Health, have put the money on the front side of research to find these drugs. The drug companies profit from the research, as they should, but they also have an obligation to the people of the United States to price these drugs fairly.

We have an obligation to create a prescription drug benefit under Medicare, as well. Americans know and we have had no cooperation, none whatever, from the Republican side of the aisle. They do not believe this to be one of the most important issues in America today and in this election. The Republicans, in resisting the Democratic plan, have missed the most important issue for seniors and their families.

What are they proposing? They want to change it in a hurry. They don’t want to come on board and work out a bipartisan plan based on what the Democrats have been pushing for, for years. Their plan is to come forward with a so-called prescription drug plan that buys them enough time to get through the election, a plan that is a sham and a phony, a plan that does
not address the real needs for prescription drug benefits for seniors. They are not offering prescription drugs. They are offering sugar pills. That will not keep America healthy.

As you read the things they have recommended to the people involved in this on the Republican side of the aisle, they may say one of the things you have to do is make sure you keep talking about this issue, make sure you empathize and tell people how much you feel for this issue.

It isn’t “feel good” politics that Americans need. They need results. They need a bipartisan plan that really does help seniors. In the next few days, if you see, as we expect, this presentation by the Republican leadership in Congress that they have finally discovered the prescription drug benefit issue and they have finally come up with a plan, you have an obligation, as I do, to ask them to prove it will work, prove it will make certain that senior citizens who need help in paying for prescription drugs get that assistance. Make certain it isn’t a phony that is just buying time until the election.

If you hear the Republican leadership, new-found convert to this issue, coming up with rhetoric that we haven’t heard for years, don’t be surprised. Their polling data has told them they are dead wrong, the Democrats are right on this issue and the Republicans have missed the boat.

It is our obligation in Congress to work with those people who have been involved on this issue for years, to make certain that any prescription drug benefit plan is real, it addresses the needs of seniors and disabled across America, it is affordable, and it will work to maintain the quality of care we expect.

These health care issues will turn out to be the biggest issue in this Presidential campaign. Yesterday, the Supreme Court decided again that managed care companies don’t have an obligation to their patients to find out that they get the best quality care as doctors recommend. Their obligation is to profit and bottom line because of existing Federal law. On this case, as well, on prescription drug benefits, the families across America are the ones who are vulnerable.

Mrs. BOXER. Will the Senator yield? Mr. DURBIN. I am happy to yield to the Senator.

Mrs. BOXER. I thank my friend for again putting this issue of prescription drugs into context. I am sure my friend would agree it isn’t unusual for political parties to take polls. However, I think what my friend is trying to say—and I hope every American can see this document—is holding in my hand, this poll. This so-called “research,” done with the Republicans over on the House side, is a document that says it all. It is the most cynical document I have ever seen since Newt Gingrich had the same thing done when he took over the House. When the Republicans told the Republicans what words to use, not what bills to pass, not what would make a good piece of legislation to help the millions of Americans who need help, no, but how to get them reelected and kowtow to their friends in the insurance business, the HMOs, and so on. If the American people could just read this document, things would change around here. I am hoping they will read this document.

I ask unanimous consent to have this document printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

(A Presentation to the House Republican Conference, June 8, 2000)

A PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN FOR STRONGER MEDICARE

(By Glen Bolger, Public Opinion Strategies)

PASSING A BILL IS A POLITICAL IMPERATIVE

Prescription drug coverage is one of the Democratic candidates’ biggest issue this election. New-found convert to this issue, Democrats enjoy a huge generic advantage on this issue.

However, the issue has enormous appeal to the Democratic candidates would do a better job of handling this issue, than the Republican candidates.

The prescription drug issue allows the Democrats to not only mobilize key sub-groups who are “up for grabs” in the 2000 election.

On a list of 18 issues that might decide how people plan to vote for president, “helping elderly Americans get access to prescription drugs” might appear to be a mid-tier issue as “only” 73% say it is one of the most important, very important in deciding how they might vote.

But, the issue has enormous appeal for Democrat candidates:

Democrats enjoy a huge generic advantage as the party best perceived as being able to handle this issue.

The prescription drug issue allows the Democrats to not only mobilize key sub-groups that are part of their political base, but the issue also is of importance to key sub-groups who are “up for grabs” in the 2000 election.

Of course, chief among these “up for grab” sub-groups are seniors who rank this issue in the top three or four that they say will determine their vote.

Top issues for the 2000 Presidential election

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<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Preserving Social Security and Medicare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stopping insurance companies from making health care decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving the quality of public education</td>
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<tr>
<td>The economy and jobs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping elderly patients safe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crime and illegal drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controlling federal spending</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving the access to affordable health care</td>
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<td>Restoring respect to the office of president</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping elderly Americans get access to affordable prescription drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pushing for higher academic standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping taxes low</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reducing the power of big money in Washington</td>
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FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Seniors trust Medicare. They don’t believe it is in financial danger—they perceive that claim to simply be a scare tactic.

The main concern seniors have with a prescription drug plan is the impact on cost. Many seniors know the median equivalent of HMO horror stories—they know other seniors who have to choose between paying for food or for prescription drugs.

“Republicans aren’t doing anything to help seniors. They also want to have choices.

Seniors like the idea of a voluntary plan, and do NOT want to lose their own plan. They also want to have choices.

Catastrophic coverage is very important to communicate. Even seniors who currently have a good plan are worried about what might happen down the road.

DEMONSTRATIONS

We tested multiple messages for the Democrats to attack Republicans on this issue. Here are the most salient attack messages:
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"Republicans are putting more seniors into HMOs. HMOs provide terrible care, and this isn’t fair to seniors."

"Republicans are in the back pocket of HMOs, insurance companies, and pharmaceutical companies. Republicans are out to protect these special interests, not the real interests of senior citizens."

Don’t ignore these charges.

MESSAGES TO ATTACK DEMOCRATS

The Democrat plan has some potentially fatal weaknesses:

- It is politicians and Washington bureaucrats setting drug prices.
- It is a one-size-fits-all plan that is too restrictive, too confusing, and puts the politicians and Washington bureaucrats in control.
- It will take most seniors out of the good private drug coverage they have today.

PHRASES THAT WORK

Too many senior citizens are forced to choose between putting food on the table and being able to afford the prescription drugs they need.

"Republicans are putting more seniors into HMOs. HMOs provide terrible care, and this isn’t fair to seniors."

We must take action to strengthen Medicare by providing prescription drug coverage for all seniors left behind.

While ensuring that all Medicare recipients have access to prescription drug coverage, we must make sure that our senior citizens also maintain control over their health care choices.

"Republicans have said: It is more important to communicate that I care (but say it better than that). I care (say it better than that)."

"Republicans are putting more seniors into HMOs. HMOs provide terrible care, and this isn’t fair to seniors."

We should not force seniors into a federal government-run, one-size-fits-all prescription drug plan that’s too restrictive, too confusing, and allows politicians and Washington bureaucrats to make medical decisions.

"Republicans know they are going to lose this election unless they get a plan. So they tell people what it is, and then turn them off?"

Our plan gives all seniors the right to choose an affordable prescription drug benefit that best fits their own health care needs.

"Republicans say: I care (but say it better than that). I care (say it better than that)."

Our plan protects low-income seniors by allowing them prescription drug coverage, and offers ALL other seniors a number of affordable options to best meet their needs and protect their pocketbooks.

By making it available to everyone, we’re making sure that no senior citizen or disabled American falls through the cracks.

"Republicans have a plan: I care (but say it better than that). I care (say it better than that)."

We will not force senior citizens out of the good private drug coverage they currently enjoy— that’s why our plan gives individuals the power to decide what’s best for them.

A stronger Medicare with prescription drug coverage is a promise of health security and financial security for older Americans and we’re working to ensure that promise is kept. America’s seniors deserve no less.

Mrs. BOXER. I ask my friend if he has read the page that says “Focus group findings.” Again, focus groups aren’t unusual. You bring people together and ask them to respond. I ask my friend about a couple of these points.

They say: Upset seniors don’t believe politicians, especially Republicans.

They don’t believe that, especially Republicans, understand how important and concerning this issue of prescription drugs is to them.

This pollster, I am sure, made a lot of money to produce this document for my friends on the other side says. The pollster says:

Message I care.

That is the message he wants Republicans to hear.

I care (but say it better than that). I care (say it better than that).

Then he says:

It is more important to communicate that you have a plan as it is to communicate what is in the plan.

What I want to say to my friend is this. After reading this, I expect they are going to come up with some phony deal that looks like a prescription drug plan. My friend has made a point: If that plan does nothing to make these prescription drugs affordable, what does it do for our people other than turn them off?

I say to my friend, he knows people in this country are going to Canada to get prescription drugs. After listening to that, I know some are going on the Internet and trying to get drugs from Mexico, prescription drugs, because they cannot afford them here.

The ultimate question, after making my comments, is this. This document goes through the fact that the Democrats are doing really well on these issues. Do you know why? Because the American people know we have a real plan on this. They don’t think we are perfect because nobody is perfect, but we have a plan on this. The Republicans know they are going to lose this election unless they get a plan. So they tell their people to use certain expressions.

Can my friend share with us some of his expressions? It says: How to talk about this issue. Our friends on the other side are told how to talk about the issue, what expressions to say in addition to “I care.” Maybe my friend will share some of that with the people?

Mr. DURBIN. I am happy to. I say to the Senator from California, this is not unusual. I don’t want to mislead people. Democrats take polls as well. We took polls years ago and found out that families really cared about the issue, and we came up with a plan, and literally for years we have been trying to bring this issue to a vote in the Senate and House of Representatives. The Republican leadership has stopped us. They stopped us because the drug companies want to continue to make the money from the seniors and others across this country who pay top dollar for their prescription drugs.

So as we pushed this, year after year, we could never find cooperation on the Republican side of the aisle. The deathbed conversion we are witnessing here now reflects the fact that an election is looming and the Republicans understand they are in a bad position. They have taken a position that is unpopular, unwise, and just plain wrong.

Take a look at some of the polling data: Preserving Social Security and Medicare is the top issue in the Presidential election campaign. Stopping insurance companies from making health care decisions is the No. 2 issue in the Presidential campaign, according to Republican polls.

They have been on the wrong side on both of these. In addition, the No. 2 issue for the Republicans in terms of the Presidential election is helping elderly Americans get access to affordable prescription drugs. Now that they realize they are wrong on the issue and it is going to be a major issue in every campaign, they are rushing to come up with a strategy.

The American people don’t want a political strategy; They want a law passed that will help these families. They understand these seniors go into their pharmacies on a daily basis and make decisions about what it is they are going to be able to fill a prescription drug. The Republicans have said in this polling document that they have to attack the Democrats. That is part of this. Say you have a plan, even though you don’t tell people what it is, and then turn around and attack the Democrats. Say it is politicians and Washington bureaucrats who are trying to set drug prices.

That language is straight out of the pharmaceutical companies’ own platform on this issue. They don’t want to have their prices affected. When the prices are in any way controlled or regulated, you have a Canadian situation where Canadian citizens pay a fraction of what we pay in the United States for the same drugs.

In the minds of Americans, that anytime we talk about pricing, it is just too much of Washington bureaucrats and politicians.

Then they say attack the Democrats plan as a one-size-fits-all plan that is too restrictive, too confusing, and puts the Washington bureaucrats in control.

The one-size-fits-all language is because the Democrats believe this should be a universal plan so people really have a chance to receive help in paying for prescription drugs. You will find the Republican plan cuts off people at levels where, frankly, they are vulnerable and cannot afford to pay for prescription drugs. It also says: Attack the Republicans. That is part of this. Say it is politicians and Washington bureaucrats who are trying to set drug prices.

Let me concede something. About a third of seniors do have good private drug coverage, a third have mediocre coverage, and a third have no protection at all. I think we can take that into account. But the bottom line is, if you happen to be a fortunate senior because, for example, you worked for a company with a union that gave you good health care benefits when you retired, that is good for you. I have met those folks. But so many others, two
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out of three, do not have that benefit. We want to make sure everybody in America is provided with access to care. Take a careful look, a careful look, at the Republican alternative. You are going to find they leave literally millions of seniors behind.

The drug companies want it that way. They don’t want prices affected. They don’t want a major plan. They believe they can create some kind of insurance protection for the seniors. I can tell you pointblank, insurance company executives have met with us and said already the Republican proposal will not work. That is the bottom line.

Mrs. BOXER. Will my friend yield further?

Mr. DURBIN. I will be happy to yield.

Mrs. BOXER. The other interesting number here is that the Republicans have found out, much to their chagrin, that Democrats have a 34-percent advantage—in the Republicans’ own poll here—on the access to affordable health care and a 33-percent advantage on prescription drugs. So they take this information but they don’t say, You know what, the Democrats are right on these issues. Let’s go over to their side of the aisle. Let’s call on President Clinton. He has been talking about protecting Medicare and so has Vice President GORE, and prescription drugs. Let’s work together now.

They say, They set out a document here that instead of saying: We just found out President Clinton is right; We just found out the Democrats are right on these issues. Let’s go over to their side of the aisle. Let’s call on President Clinton. He has been talking about protecting Medicare and so has Vice President GORE, and prescription drugs. Let’s work together now. They say, They set out a document here that instead of saying: We just found out President Clinton is right; We just found out the Democrats are right on these issues. Let’s go over to their side of the aisle. Let’s call on President Clinton. He has been talking about protecting Medicare and so has Vice President GORE, and prescription drugs. Let’s work together now.

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The first thing we will do is reduce the deficit. Once we bring that deficit under control, we think the economy will move forward.

We could not get a single Republican in the House or the Senate to vote with us on that. Only the Democrats voted for it and Vice President GORE, sitting in the Presiding Officer’s chair, cast the tie-breaking vote to reduce the deficit and move us forward. And it worked.

Critics on the other side of the aisle, a Republican Senator from Texas, said this was going to create an economic disaster for America. He has a little egg on his face today because for 7 years it has created just the opposite: economic prosperity. That was a good thing.

Tough decisions from the Federal Reserve Board regarding interest rates, for example, have kept inflation under control.

We are moving forward. We believe on the Democratic side that we cannot stand back and say we deserve election and reelection because of all the good things we did in the past. That is not good enough. If any party deserves election or reelection, it is because they learned the lessons of history and they have a vision of the future.

The vision tells us to take the surplus we are generating in our Treasury and pay down the national debt, a debt of almost $6 trillion that cost us taxpayers $1 billion a day in interest payments. That is right, the payroll taxes they are taking out of your paycheck and taking away from businesses and families across America to the tune of $1 billion a day do not educate a kid, they do not buy anything to enhance the security of America. That money is used exclusively to pay interest on old debt.

Think about it. We are paying interest on the debt for things we bought years ago that we have already built and maybe have used. We on the Democratic side believe that the fiscally prudent thing to do, the responsible thing to do is to take our surplus and reduce that $6 trillion debt. I want to say to my kids and my grandson: The best legacy I can leave you is less of an American debt so that you do not have to carry my burdens into your generation.

I believe that makes sense, and that is what Vice President GORE has stood for: To reduce America’s national debt and to strengthen Social Security and Medicare as we do that to make sure those two systems are there for years to come.

If we just stop at that point, we would not be doing enough. We have to have a vision for this century and ask, What decisions can we make as leaders of Government in Washington today to create opportunities for tomorrow?
It comes down to the four basic issues already identified by the Democrats and acknowledged by the Republicans.

First, health care in America. It is disgraceful in America that we still have tens of millions of people who have no health insurance. Think about their vulnerability: an accident, an illness, and all the plans they have made for their life just fall apart. They have medical bills they cannot possibly pay. People are in a vulnerable position because we have not addressed health care in America. We believe we need to address health care when it comes to not only coverage of health insurance but prescription drug benefits for the elderly and disabled under Medicare and, most basically to make sure medical decisions are made by doctors and not by insurance companies.

Yesterday, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in an important case involving an HMO, a managed care company, in my State of Illinois at the Carle Clinic. A woman called the Carle Clinic in Bloomington, Ill., and reported she was having pains in her stomach. They said: We would like to examine you. Why don’t you come in 8 days.

Before she could go to the clinic her appendix burst, and she went through a terrible situation and a terrible recuperation in the hospital.

She came to learn that this plan, as so many other managed care plans, actually rewarded doctors financially if they showed more profit for the company as opposed to providing quality health care. The bottom line was making money. The bottom line said let the lady wait at home for 8 days and see if she still complains instead of bringing her into the office for an examination.

She sued them. She said: I thought I could trust you. I thought that was the bottom line when it comes to the health insurance company. The bottom line was profit, and it was made at my expense. I paid for it in a hospital stay.

The Supreme Court said: You cannot do anything about it. Congress passed legislation that said managed care companies can do that and you cannot sue them. Your right against these companies is extremely limited. That is a Federal decision.

That is a decision that should be changed. That is one Democrats have pushed for on Capitol Hill for years and the Republican leadership has blocked it. These insurance companies are making big dollars. They are big special interest groups. They are big players on the Washington political scene.

They do not want anybody changing these rules. That is why they have resisted, really we have done literally nothing in the Senate and the House to deal with these abuses.

Education: Can anyone think of anything in the 21st century more important than education in America? I cannot. We are going to have to debate in the near future an issue that is a hot issue. There are many who believe globalization and free trade are part of America’s future, part of the future of the world. To resist trade is to resist gravity; it is going to happen.

The question is, How will we respond to it? Many workers are concerned that if there is expanded trade, they might lose their jobs. Companies will take their plants and move them overseas, and folks who have good jobs today don’t have tomorrow. Shouldn’t we as a nation acknowledge that, whether the jobs are lost to trade or technology? Shouldn’t we be putting in place transition training and education so workers do not have to fear this inevitable change in the economy?

We are not hearing any suggestions on this from the Republican side. They do not believe there should be a Federal role when it comes to education and training. They talk about it being a historic and local issue. Historically, but we have had Federal leadership that has made a difference on these issues. We believe on the Democratic side we should continue to do that.

I will tell my colleagues about another related issue. We know from the best companies in America that the single biggest problem they have today is not estate taxes; it is not a tax burden under the code. The single biggest problem they have today is jobs they cannot fill with skilled workers.

I hear that in Illinois everywhere I go. I was in Itasca yesterday with the Chamber of Commerce. That is their concern as well. We have to acknowledge the fact there are good paying jobs unfilled in America because we do not have skilled workers to fill them.

What do we do about it? Wait for the market to create? I hope we will do more. In 1957, when the Russians launched Sputnik and we were afraid we were going to lose the space race, this Congress responded and said: We will respond as a nation. We will create the National Defense Education Act. We are going to encourage young people to get a college education to be scientists, to be engineers, to compete with the Russians. We did it. It was an investment that paid off handsomely.

We created an engine for growth in the American economy that not only made certain the private sector had the people they needed but also sent a man to the Moon and so many other achievements unparalleled in the history of the world.

Why are we not doing the same thing today? Why are we not acknowledging we need to make an investment at the Federal level to help pay for college education so kids have a chance to become tomorrow’s scientists and engineers, leaders of the 21st century so we do not have to import computer experts from India and Pakistan?

It is pretty obvious what is going to have to happen. We are going to have to make a change in the system because the current flow of revenue from 3.3 workers to support 1 retiree will be dramatically reduced when you only have 2 workers. You cannot keep the...