

every year recently. It's too late to plant any cash crops in that part of the state. Some farmers will plant a "cover crop" to control erosion; others simply will try to control weeds and start planning for next year.

As in every disaster that my state has faced, I've been inspired once again by the people of Minnesota, who rally together for their communities when tragedy strikes. It's during critical times such as these that we finally understand the importance of neighbor helping neighbor. At a time when we all too often fail to make the effort to get to know and appreciate our neighbors, Minnesotans in a great many of our communities have formed lasting bonds over this past week and found their civic spirit has been restored.

Mr. President, I intend to work with Governor Ventura to examine the need for federal funding to help those Minnesotans devastated by this most recent flooding. I also want to work with the Governor, the Farm Services Administration, and the Department of Agriculture in anticipation of federal funding needs for farmers who have had severe crop losses. I stand together with my colleagues in the Minnesota delegation, and with our colleagues from North Dakota who are facing destruction in their states equal to our own. When disaster strikes, we are not Republicans or Democrats. We are representatives of the people, and we will do whatever we must to protect our citizens when their lives, homes and property are threatened.

THE PRESIDENT'S ROADLESS INITIATIVE

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. President, I come to the floor of the Senate this week as the Forest Service has launched a series of meetings in my state and around the country to solicit comments on the Administration's proposed roadless initiative. I want to encourage Oregonians to send in their comments and attend these meetings to make their voices heard.

I am concerned that so many of my constituents will not take part in this comment period in part because they believe that this roadless policy is a foregone conclusion. Frankly, I don't think the Forest Service did much to change those feelings by including language in its draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which characterized loggers, mill workers, and people in the timber products industry in general as uneducated, opportunistic, and unable to adapt to change. Many Oregonians, not just those in resource industries, were offended by this.

I understand that the Administration has subsequently apologized, but I am afraid this incident only added to the feeling held by many Oregonians that the decisions about this roadless plan have already been made. So I want to

take this opportunity today to outline some of my concerns about this roadless initiative and to encourage other Oregonians to take advantage of the remaining weeks of this public comment period to do the same.

Mr. President, the management of the roadless areas in our National Forest System has been the subject of debate for many years. We had the RARE I (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation) process in the early 1970s leading to inventories and analysis of the large roadless areas in our National Forests. Then we had RARE II under the Carter Administration.

That process was followed by a number of state-specific bills, such as the Oregon Wilderness Act of 1984, where roadless areas that were suitable for wilderness protection were so designated and other roadless areas were to be released for multiple uses. Despite the growth of the wilderness system in this country, the management of other roadless areas has remained controversial.

Now this Administration has proposed a roadless initiative that would permanently ban road construction from some 43 million acres of inventoried roadless areas. In addition, this draft EIS calls for each Forest, upon its periodic Forest Plan revision, to protect additional roadless areas, often referred to as uninventoried roadless areas. No one, not even the Forest Service, seems to know how many millions of acres that may ultimately be. So the President is proposing setting aside an additional 45 to 60 million acres of the National Forest system on top of the 35 million acres that are already designated as wilderness areas. Let me remind my colleagues that the entire National Forest System is 192 million acres and that there are numerous riparian areas and wildlife buffer zones that are also off limits to road construction. So we may well have more than half of our National Forest System permanently set aside and inaccessible to most of the public by the time this Administration is through.

What is even more alarming to me is the position of the Vice President on this issue. In a speech to the League of Conservation Voters last month, AL GORE said the Administration's preferred alternative does not go far enough. Perhaps Mr. GORE's "Progress and Prosperity" tour should make a few stops in rural Oregon so he can see first-hand the results of eight years of passive management of our federal lands—double digit unemployment and four day school weeks. As part of the Administration that is writing this rule and is supposedly keeping an open mind while taking comments from the public this month, it seems a bit premature for the Vice President to speak so favorably of an alternative that is ostensibly still being reviewed. I know the Chairman of the Senate Energy

Committee and the Chairman of the House Resources Committee have requested the Vice President recuse himself from the rest of this rule-making process. I agree with the Chairmen and hope the Vice President will try to restore the public's confidence that this rule-making is not predetermined and that it is open, as required by law, to the comments and suggestions of the public.

Mr. President, some of my colleagues may ask why new roads may be needed in the National Forest System. There are many reasons, but perhaps the most urgent purpose is forest health.

A century of fire suppression followed by years of inactive forest management under this Administration have left our National Forest System overstocked with underbrush and unnaturally dense tree stands that are now at risk of catastrophic wildfire. The GAO recently found that at least 39 million acres of the National Forest System are at high risk for catastrophic fire. According to the Forest Service, 26 million acres are at risk from insects and disease infestations as well. The built up fuel loads in these forests create abnormally hot wildfires that are extremely difficult to control. This year's fires in New Mexico have given us a preview of what is to come throughout our National Forest System if we continue this Administration's policy of passive forest management.

To prevent catastrophic fire and widespread insect infestation and disease outbreaks, these forests need to be treated. The underbrush needs to be removed. The forests must be thinned to allow the remaining trees to grow more rapidly and more naturally. While some of this work can be done without roads, roads are many times required in order to carry out this necessary work. Yet this Administration apparently wants to make it more difficult to address these problems, more difficult to stop fires like those in New Mexico before they start. And the Vice President wants to go even further than that.

Why else are roads needed in the National Forest System? Forest roads provide millions of Americans with access to the National Forests for recreational purposes. With the Forest Service predicting tremendous increases in recreational visits to the National Forest System in the coming years, shouldn't there at least be a thorough examination of how this roadless plan will affect the remaining areas of our National Forests, which will apparently have to absorb most of these new visitors? And what about the needs of seniors and disabled visitors? Compounding the problem, this Administration will be decommissioning many roads currently used by recreational visitors. In its rush to complete this sweeping rule, this Administration does not seem to have the time

to examine seriously the impacts of steering more and more recreational visitors to a smaller percentage of the Forest System.

Mr. President, I am also concerned about how this roadless initiative is supposed to interact with the Northwest Forest Plan. Last year, I came to the floor of the Senate and I expressed concerns about this Administration's forestry policies and its weak implementation of its own plan that was supposed to lay the groundwork for a cooperative resolution to the timber disputes of the early 1990s. Unfortunately, as our federal agencies scour the forests to survey for mosses, we continue to have gridlock in the Northwest, with none of the promised sustainable and predictable timber harvests in sight. So how much confidence does this Administration have in its own Northwest Forest Plan? By reading its roadless proposal, the answer is "not much." Clinton's Northwest Forest Plan has thorough standards and guidelines for activities in the forests covered by the plan, including road-building. This Administration had previously exempted the Northwest Forest Plan forests from its road building moratoriums because it was still clinging to the notion that its plan was the model for forestry policy in the future. Unlike those temporary moratoria, however, the Administration's roadless initiative makes no exception for the forests covered by the Northwest Forest Plan. To me, this suggests that even this Administration is acknowledging what many in the Northwest have said for some time: The Clinton Forest Plan is a failure. Rural Oregon already knew that. Now with this roadless proposal, this Administration will only make it harder for any future Administration to keep its promises under the Northwest Forest Plan. This fact is most obvious in the town of Klamath Falls in southern Oregon. Like many towns in the Northwest surrounded by federal lands, Klamath Falls was encouraged by this Administration to create jobs and economic growth through recreation and ecotourism in order to compensate for the loss of the timber jobs. Of course, it is difficult to find substitutes for the family wage jobs that the timber industry once provided for these towns. Nevertheless, rural Oregon has tried to diversify its economy.

More than three years ago, developers and community leaders in Klamath Falls embarked upon the arduous process of obtaining a special use permit to launch a winter recreation area at Pelican Butte in the nearby Winema National Forest. Millions of dollars were spent and countless hours were invested by everyone from the local forest service, to the developers, to the local government and the community as a whole. A final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

are due next year. Now, due to the fact that Pelican Butte will require three miles of road in a currently inventoried roadless area, the Administration's roadless initiative will effectively kill the plan. In its zeal to complete this plan before leaving office, this Administration apparently does not want to take the time to make reasonable accommodations for proposals that have been in the pipeline for years. Never mind the fact that the Pelican Butte project will result in a net decrease in road mileage on National Forest lands. Never mind the fact that Oregonians were told by this Administration to go and find other means to develop their economy outside of timber. The message to Oregonians is clear: If the roadless plan is to be concluded before President Clinton leaves office, there is no time to spare to consider the effort and good will invested by the people of Klamath Falls in the Pelican Butte proposal. The fact is that this Administration doesn't care how many rural communities are left in the dust by this regulatory juggernaut.

Mr. President, all of this is very discouraging for Oregonians who have a sense this Administration has already made up its mind on this roadless initiative. It is my understanding that many of my constituents have just received copies of this draft EIS in the last few days—with half of the brief comment period already expired. Nevertheless, from the floor of the Senate today, I am pleading with my constituents to get out there during this comment period and make their voices heard. This rulemaking is too significant for Oregonians to be silent.

Mr. President, I agree with this Administration that we need a long-term resolution to the management of our roadless areas. But common sense tells us that what is needed and appropriate for one area may not be sound stewardship for another. With this roadless initiative, this Administration is talking about setting aside in one broad stroke millions of acres that are supposed to be held in trust for all Americans. Even worse, this plan is being rushed through a truncated public comment process in order to accommodate an artificial political deadline. This isn't the way to manage our precious natural resources and this isn't the way to treat our rural communities. The management of these roadless areas is a complicated question, and it deserves more than the simple answer being force-fed to us by this Administration.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS UNDER MEDICARE

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss an issue that has become increasingly important to many in Congress. As an early sponsor of legislation to provide prescription drug coverage under Medicare, I am

pleased there has been progress in reaching an agreement among many proposals to provide prescription drug benefits to seniors.

Medicare recently celebrated its 35th anniversary. As with most things in life this program is now starting to show its age. Still being administered under a model developed in 1965, Medicare is quickly becoming antiquated and blind to the many advances in modern medicine. We all know prescription drugs play an increasingly important role in the health of our nation.

There are countless examples of drugs which now allow us to live longer, more productive lives. Drugs to control blood pressure, lower cholesterol, or mitigate the effects of a stroke are a few which demonstrate the measurable impact research and development can have on improving our lives. Unfortunately, the Medicare program has not progressed as rapidly as medicine.

To that end, I introduced the Medicare Ensuring Prescription Drugs for Seniors Act, or MEDS. My bill was an early attempt to heighten the debate surrounding prescription drugs, and at the same time provide a plan that would address the needs of the nearly one third of senior citizens in this country who currently lack any form of prescription coverage. We have all heard the frightening stories of the choices that many seniors are forced to make when it comes to paying for prescription drugs. Unfortunately, many of these stories have been politicized and used to stir the political cauldron over the past several months. But the reality is that decisions between food, shelter, and medicine are all too common among our neediest seniors. MEDS was introduced to help these people.

My plan would add a prescription benefit under the already existing Part B of Medicare, without creating or adding any new overly bureaucratic component to the Medicare program. It works like this: The part B beneficiary would have the opportunity to access the benefit as long as they were Medicare eligible. Those with incomes below 135 percent of the nation's poverty level would be provided the benefit without a deductible and would only be responsible for a 25 percent copayment for all approved medications.

My bill also provides relief for seniors above the 135 percent income threshold who may face overwhelming drug costs because of the number of prescriptions they take or the relative costs of them, by paying for 75 percent of the costs after a \$150 monthly deductible is met. Most importantly, this voluntary benefit does not have a treatment cap. Unlike both the President's plan and others currently being debated in Congress, MEDS covers all participating beneficiaries no matter