

CUTS IN MEDICARE

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, earlier this week House and Senate Republicans unveiled their respective 7-year budget resolutions. The promise of the House resolution—a balanced budget by the year 2002 and tax cuts for wealthy Americans—is being championed by several prominent Senate Republicans. Although the Senate budget resolution contains a Boxer amendment that expresses the sense of Congress that 90 percent of the benefits of potential tax cuts go to the middle class, I have every expectation that the Republican bill will be a windfall for the wealthy. Moreover, the details on how the savings would be achieved are sketchy and are left for authorizing and appropriating committees.

The Senate Budget Committee resolution assumes a \$256 billion cut in Medicare spending over 7 years, but provides no guidelines to the Senate Finance Committee on how these savings will be achieved. This proposed cut is by far the largest Medicare cut in history, and the adverse impact on beneficiaries and providers is clear.

If Medicare cuts of this magnitude are approved, the Department of Health and Human Services estimates that senior citizens' out-of-pocket expenses will increase by \$900 a year or a total of \$3,500 over the 7 years. As 83 percent of Medicare benefits go to beneficiaries with incomes of \$25,000 or less, it is obvious who will be hurt by these cuts, yet the budget remains silent on how it will be done.

In addition, cuts to providers would have serious ramifications on overall health care costs as cuts in provider reimbursement are often passed along to other payers. Provider cuts could also have a potentially devastating impact on urban safety-net hospitals which already bear a disproportionate share of the Nation's growing burden of uncompensated care. These reductions in Medicare payments could also endanger access to care in rural areas. Nearly 10 million Medicare beneficiaries—25 percent of the total—live in rural areas. There is often only a single hospital in their county. Significant cuts in Medicare have the potential of causing rural hospitals to close or increase the number of providers that refuse to treat Medicare beneficiaries.

I was appalled to hear that during markup of the resolution, the Senate Budget Committee, on a party-line vote, rejected two proposals to restore funding to Medicare in lieu of providing tax cuts. Obviously, this massive cut in Medicare funding would be unnecessary if Republicans did not have to pay for a tax cut for wealthy citizens.

We must work to ensure that any effort to extend the solvency of the Medicare trust fund does not put Medicare beneficiaries at risk. And we must protect the program for future enrollees. I support President Clinton's view that the Medicare trust fund must be re-

solved in the context of health care reform.

Mr. President, without comprehensive health care reform, significant cuts in Medicare and Medicaid will seriously harm beneficiaries and the total health care system as costs will be shifted onto families and businesses. Only by focusing on the entire health care delivery system will be able to address issues within Medicare and preserve access for Medicare beneficiaries and underserved populations.

Let me close on this point. While we have heard Members on the other side of the aisle promise to protect Social Security, the GOP budget reaches balance by the year 2002, only by including the Social Security trust funds in the budget calculations.

While I fully recognize the critical need to ensure long-term stability in the Medicare Program and support efforts to balance our budget, I am opposed to using arbitrary cuts in the Medicare Program to finance a tax break for wealthy Americans. I look forward to working with my colleagues on addressing these important issues.

Mr. President, I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

INTERSTATE TRANSPORTATION OF MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE ACT

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

THE BOTTLE BILL AMENDMENT

Mr. HATFIELD. Mr. President, as the Senate discusses the difficult issue of solid waste management, I would like to point out to my colleagues that 10 States have achieved great success by implementing some form of beverage container deposit system. My home State of Oregon, for example, has had remarkable success with its own bottle bill for over 20 years. Consequently, I am offering the National Beverage Container Reuse and Recycling Act as an amendment to the interstate waste bill.

So often, States serve as laboratories for what later emerges as successful national policies. The State of Oregon and other bottle-bill States have proven that deposit programs are an effective method to deal with beverage containers, which make up the single largest component of waste systems. According to the General Accounting Office, deposit-law States, which account for only 18 percent of the population, recycle 65 percent of all glass and 98 percent of all PET plastic nationwide. That means 82 percent of the population is recycling less than 25 percent of our Nation's beverage container waste.

The amendment I have placed before the Senate today will accomplish national objectives to meet our Nation's massive waste management difficulties. A national deposit system will reduce solid waste and litter, save natural resources and energy, and create a much needed partnership between consumers, industry, and local governments for the betterment of our communities.

As someone who grew up during the Great Depression, I am constantly reminded of the throw-away ethic that has emerged so prominently in this country. In this regard, Oregon's deposit system serves as a much greater role than merely cleaning up littered highways, saving energy and resources, or reducing the waste flowing into our teeming landfills. The bottle bill acts as a tutor. It is a constant reminder of the conservation ethic that is an essential component of any plan to see this country out of its various crises. Each time a consumer returns a can for deposit, the conservation ethic is reaffirmed, and hopefully the consumer will then reapply this ethic in other areas.

As many of my colleagues know, I have a 20-year history on this issue and have been greatly enthused by developments in recent years in promoting the establishment of a national bottle bill. The amendment I filed today is identical to the legislation I introduced last Congress. Although this bill has historically been referred to the Senate Commerce Committee, in recent years significant actions on this measure have come in the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Senator JEFFORDS offered the bill as an amendment to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act [RCRA] in the Environment and Public Works Committee during the 102d Congress. Even though this attempt failed by a vote of 6 to 10 it was a monumental step forward. Additionally, during that same Congress a hearing was held in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on the energy conservation implications of beverage container recycling as outlined in that session's bottle bill, S. 2335.

I regret that I continually have come to the Senate floor to force the Senate to take action on this matter, but that seems to be the only effective procedure for moving forward on this bill. For example, during the 1992 Presidential campaign, candidate Bill Clinton declared his support for a national bottle bill. However, once he took office he and a Democratic-controlled Congress were surprisingly silent on the issue in the 103d Congress. Consequently, here I am again offering the Beverage Container Reuse and Recycling Act as an amendment on the Senate floor.