

part of a reconciliation bill that is designed to cut spending for the purpose of accommodating additional tax cuts.

One of the reasons that Medicare has such widespread support is because it provides health insurance coverage for virtually all older Americans. If through means testing we create an incentive for wealthier, healthier people to drop out of the program because they can get a better deal outside of Medicare, then we ought to at least understand and consider the ramifications of that.

There are other things about the Senate bill that create substantial new burdens on low- and moderate-income older Americans. Under this bill, seniors will be asked to pay significant new out-of-pocket costs. In North Dakota, 70 percent of our senior citizens have incomes under \$15,000, and on average, they spend \$2,500 for prescription drugs and other health care expenses not covered by Medicare or supplemental insurance. Many of these folks simply cannot afford to pay much more.

I am concerned about the new \$5 co-payment for home health visits. I voted to eliminate this new cost from the Senate bill. While \$5 may not seem like a lot of money to many of us, a lot of the seniors who rely on home health care cannot afford this extra expense and might be forced to enter a hospital or nursing home at significantly greater cost to the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

This bill also erodes the protections that currently exist in Medicare which limit the amount doctors can charge Medicare beneficiaries above and beyond the Medicare-approved amount. This bill results in millions of dollars in new out-of-pocket costs.

The conferees on this bill have an opportunity to address these concerns and to drop troubling provisions from the bill, such as the means testing of the Medicare premium, the increase in the Medicare eligibility age, and the new home health care co-payment. Eliminating these provisions from the final bill would still lengthen the solvency of the Medicare program for 10 more years, and I hope the conference committee will take this action.●

TRIBUTE TO JESSE BROWN, SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

● Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, the veterans' community is about to lose one of its best and strongest champions—Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Jesse Brown. After 4 years as the Secretary, Jesse Brown is retiring from Government service. He will be deeply missed by millions of veterans and their families, and everyone else who has had the good fortune of working with him.

Secretary Brown is one of the staunchest advocates the veterans' community has ever known. A veteran himself, injured during the Vietnam war, he articulated passionately and

eloquently the needs of veterans, and the obligation of our Government to take care of those who served, often at great personal sacrifice. His oratory could move an audience to tears, and there was never any question but that his concern was genuine and sincere. He truly was a "veterans' veteran," as he was often called, and he fought to the last to further and protect veterans' best interests.

Jesse Brown undertook an ambitious agenda as Secretary. Under his watch, the Veterans Health Administration was reorganized into 22 Veterans Integrated Service Networks [VISNs], the VA health care system began the transition from inpatient to outpatient care, the Veterans Benefits Administration moved to reduce its tremendous backlog of cases, and benefits were extended to Persian Gulf war veterans suffering from undiagnosed illnesses and Vietnam veterans' children born with spina bifida. Most significantly, he was tremendously successful in protecting his department from some of the deep budget cuts suffered by most other Federal agencies.

Secretary Brown's departure is a great loss. I wish him every success in the years ahead—and I have every confidence that he will succeed in whatever he undertakes.●

● Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Jesse Brown, who will retire as Secretary of Veterans Affairs on July 1, 1997.

Since his appointment to this post on January 22, 1993, Secretary Brown has been the champion of our Nation's 26 million veterans. But his commitment to those who fought for this country began long before he accepted the awesome responsibility of heading the Federal Government's largest Department.

Secretary Brown's service in the Marine Corps formed the foundation for his strong commitment to veterans. He later worked for the Disabled American Veterans, where he was an advocate for the highest quality healthcare and benefits for veterans and their families. Secretary Brown translated his personal experiences into action as he accepted the charge of providing for those who have protected our country.

As a fellow veteran, I appreciate all of Secretary Brown's work on behalf of our Nation's veterans and their families. In the 4½ years since he accepted this challenging post, he has worked diligently to move the VA into the 21st century. His personal commitment to veterans has produced numerous accomplishments.

Secretary Brown has overseen the Department's first national summit on homeless veterans. He has worked to expand the Department's services to women veterans. And under his leadership, the VA has opened community based outpatient clinics, giving more veterans wider access to VA healthcare services. In all that he has done, his commitment to broadening veterans' access to the system has never faltered.

Throughout his service, Secretary Brown has gone out of his way to ensure that those who honorably served their country receive the attention, benefits, and services they deserve. Last year, Secretary Brown visited New Jersey, where he personally met with veterans to address their concerns about benefits and the VA healthcare system. After this meeting, numerous veterans from New Jersey contacted me to convey their appreciation for Secretary Brown's work on their behalf.

Mr. President, Secretary Brown's service to this country will be sorely missed. As a fellow veteran, I join all of the veterans in New Jersey and across the country in thanking him for his work and wishing him well in his future endeavors.●

TRIBUTE TO THE HONORABLE JESSE BROWN

● Mr. BRYAN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the innumerable contributions and outstanding leadership that have characterized the tenure of the Honorable Jesse Brown as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. It is with great appreciation, as well as sadness, that I speak of his accomplishments today, as his term as the chief of the second-largest agency in the Federal Government will come to an end on the first of July. Under his guidance over the past 4½ years, the Department of Veterans Affairs has undergone some of the most fundamental changes in decades. In the past, such groundbreaking reforms and restructuring may have inspired fear on Capitol Hill and in veterans' facilities across the Nation, but with Jesse Brown at the helm, the Department has undergone a transformation with support, hard-earned at times, from both budget-cutters in Congress and from veterans across the country.

When Secretary Brown took office in 1993, he was faced with an outdated health-care delivery system stretched to its limits trying to maintain too many large, aging hospitals. The Secretary rose to the challenge by closing hospitals that did not serve their patients well and beginning an overhaul of the entire VA medical system into a network of 22 regional provider regions. Within these regions, increased attention is being given to the quality of care available as well as to outpatient services. These changes, which are still taking hold in many places, demonstrate the vision that Secretary Brown brought to his work; a vision of changing with the times, but never giving up on the primary focus of providing services to veterans.

Secretary Brown's unyielding drive to ensure that veterans have access to needed services is very important to Nevada, one of only two States in the Nation where the population of veterans is growing. While my State's problems are very different than those of a Northeastern or Midwestern State,