The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is the understanding.

FAMILY OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 2000

Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the Family Opportunity Act, S. 2744. Senator KENNEDY and I introduced this bill in March of this year. Representatives SESSIONS and WAXMAN introduced the companion bill in the House of Representatives in August. It is a strongly bipartisan bill. There are 77 Senate cosponsors and 139 House cosponsors. This bill will make life easier for working American parents caring for a child with a severe disability.

Shortly after introducing this bill, I worked in a bipartisan way to secure a budget reserve fund in the budget resolution. Subsequently, the Senate Budget Committee convened a hearing on the bill. Then, in July, the President announced his support for the bill.

Logic would tell us that a bill with this kind of bipartisan support would stand a good chance of being approved by the Congress. Unfortunately, this bill is not among the final, end-of-year legislative packages. One likely explanation is that the families who would be helped by this bill do not have the same kind of political influence and clout that other powerful interest groups have. Working parents are not a powerful voice in Washington, even though they have every legitimate right to be a powerful voice in Washington.

Interestingly, today the bill was discussed on the House floor by a very powerful Member of the House of Representatives. The distinguished House Member was under the impression that the Family Opportunity Act is primarily a Democratic bill. In fact, the Family Opportunity Act has broad bipartisan support. In addition, it is based on strongly held Republican principles.

The Family Opportunity Act is, No. 1, pro-family, No. 2, pro-work, No. 3, pro-opportunity and, No. 4, pro-States rights.

Pro-family. When you are a parent, your main objective is to provide for your child to the best of your ability. Right now, our Federal Government takes this goal and turns it upside down for parents of children with special health care needs. In the worst cases, parents give up custody of their child with special health care needs or put their child in an out-of-home placement just to keep their child's access to Medicaid-covered services.

Pro-work. Federal policies today force these parents to choose between work and their children's health care. That is a terrible choice.

Many parents of children with disabilities refuse jobs, pay raises, and overtime just to preserve access to Medicaid for their child with disabilities. Thousands of families across the country are caught in this Catch-22.

Pro-opportunity. The Family Opportunity Act of 2000 was created to help parents have the opportunities they deserve. It does so by providing parents the opportunity to work without the fear of harming their children. Allowing parents to break free from constraints that force many of them to stay impoverished is a win-win. Parents who work are also taxpayers. That's good for the government and the economy. And, parents who work are better able to provide for their families. That's good for children.

Pro-States rights. Governor Huckabee from Arkansas said it best at the Senate Budget Committee hearing I chaired in July. He said:

> The Family Opportunity Act encourages progress for the family and places government on the side of the people where it should be. No child and no family should be the victim of a process which conspires against the very foundational principles on which we have existed for over 200 years. This Act will restore principled leadership from all of us as leaders who rightly see our roles as servants of the citizens, not the other way around.

I can't emphasize strongly enough how important a bill like the Family Opportunity Act is to working families across America. Everybody wants to use their talents to the fullest potential, and every parent wants to provide as much as possible for his or her children. The government shouldn't get in the way.

If this bill is allowed to die, that would be a missed opportunity of the highest level. I urge my colleagues to reconsider its status.

Winston Churchill once said:

> Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense.

Legislation to help families help themselves make good sense.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. First of all, I thank Senator GRASSLEY. I very much appreciate his effort, with Senator KENNEDY. He does not give in, especially when it is a matter of principle to him. I thank him for his good work.

BANKRUPTCY REFORM ACT CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, as of today, we are scheduled to have a cloture vote tomorrow. It is going to be on the bankruptcy conference report. One would think that in the final days of this Congress—of this Senate—we actually would be talking about debating and passing legislation that would promote the economic security of families in our country.

We could focus on health security for families. We could focus on raising the minimum wage. We could focus on affordable child care. We could focus on affordable housing. We could focus on reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Thank God people in the country are so focused on a good education for their children or their grandchildren.

Instead, we are spending our final days debating an unjust and imbalanced bankruptcy bill which is entirely for the benefit of big banks and the credit card companies. In one way, I am very sad to say this piece of legislation is truly representative of the 106th Congress. It is an anti-consumer, give-away-to-big-business bill, in a Congress which has been dominated by special interest legislation. And it is representative of the 106th Congress in another way, too: It represents distorted priorities. We could be doing so much to enhance and support ordinary citizens in our country. Instead, we now have this legislation before us.

I want Senators to know, if they are watching, I will, as they come to the floor, interrupt my remarks so others can speak in opposition. We have a lot of ground to cover. We intend to cover that ground because this piece of legislation deserves scrutiny. It should be held up to the light of day so citizens in this country can see what an ill-made, mishandled attempt this piece of legislation is. Other Senators need to understand what bad legislation this is, how terrible its impact will be on America's most powerless families, and what a complete giveaway it is to banks, credit card companies, and other powerful interests.

This is a worse bill than the bill we voted on earlier in the Senate. It is important for colleagues to understand that not only is this a worse piece of legislation, we had a provision in the bill that passed the Senate—albeit a flawed bill—the Kohl amendment, which said that while we are punishing low- and moderate-income people, families that have gone under because of bankruptcy, in 40 percent or 50 percent of the cases because of medical bills, you certainly don't want to enable millionaires to basically buy million-dollar homes in several States and in that way shield themselves from any liability. That provision was taken out. That is reason enough for Senators to vote against this bill.

In addition, Senator SCHUMER had a provision that said, when people are breaking the law and blocking people from being able to go to family planning clinics, they should not be able to shield themselves from legal expenses and other expenses by not being held liable when it comes to bankruptcy. The Schumer provision was taken out.

If that is not enough for Senators, the way in which the majority leader has advanced this bill makes a mockery out of the legislative process. If we love this institution and we believe in an open, public, and accountable legislative and political process, then I don't see how we can support taking a State Department conference report—I call it the ''invasion of the body snatchers''—completely gutting that so there is not a word about the State Department any longer and, instead, putting in this bankruptcy bill, far worse than the bill passed by the Senate.