

by this problematical and, many believe, perhaps mostly hypothetical and politically motivated, provision.

We all know that this bill has repeatedly won the overwhelming approval of our colleagues in both Houses of Congress.

Before we began a conference meeting on an earlier version a few years ago I referred to that meeting as being the last leg of a legislative marathon. I was wrong then—but I hope, and I have every confidence, that this floor debate represents the final beginning of that last leg.

We succeeded in finally enacting the class action reform bill 2 weeks ago and I am hopeful that we can duplicate this success with the bankruptcy bill over the next several days.

As many have said, this is a compromise bill that enjoys broad bipartisan support among Democrats and Republicans, and conservatives and liberals.

Even after having worked for 8 years already, we agreed to make some additional compromises in the Judiciary Committee during mark-up 2 weeks ago to satisfy some concerns of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle. Those compromises were difficult to make, but we have made them.

I should add that there are some on our side of the aisle, such as Senator CORNYN, who would like to make additional changes in this bill. He has a very substantial proposal addressing the issue of venue reform. It is an area in which he has special expertise from his experiences with some important bankruptcies that affected many citizens of Texas but were litigated out of State.

There are things I would like to see changed in the bill.

But I also recognize that many have cooperated and compromised in order to reach the state where this legislation is today. Given the extensive and lengthy history of this bill, I think it best for my colleagues to refrain from offering controversial amendments on this vehicle at this time—and I will do so because I know that any further amendments might scuttle this bill.

This bill provides new consumer protections, helps children in need of child support, and makes other necessary reforms to a system that is open to abuse.

I want to stress the fact that this legislation does not make it more difficult for people to file for bankruptcy, but it does eliminate some of the opportunities for abuse that exist under the current system.

This is a good bill. We should pass it promptly and send it to the House.

It is possible that during this debate that some may falsely suggest that this bill unfairly treats low-income persons. Let me tell you at the outset that the poor are not affected by the means test. The legislation provides a safe harbor for those who fall below the median income, so they are not subjected to the means test at all. What

the means test is designed to do, and what it will do, is to prevent abuse by those who can and should pay a portion of their debts with future earnings. It will stop the fraud. It will stop the abuse of a system that has been going on through some of these unscrupulous lawyers and bankruptcy helpers.

Another misconception that I have heard again and again from opponents of the bill is that this legislation will not let people file for bankruptcy relief when they need it. The fact is that this legislation does not deny anyone access to bankruptcy relief, it just requires those who have the means to repay their debts based on their income and ability to pay.

It is that simple. It is fair. It is a long overdue change for the better.

Some opponents of this legislation have also claimed that it somehow hurts women and children. This falsehood is particularly disturbing for me to hear, because I have had a long history of advocating for children and families in Congress, and I have worked tirelessly, provision by provision, to make this legislation dramatically improve the position of children and ex-spouses who are entitled to domestic support. I have already told you in some detail why these allegations are baseless and how this bill works to help women and children.

I look forward to participating in this debate.

This is a very good bill.

It represents years of bipartisan, bicameral work. It is time we pass this bill. This President will sign this bill.

I hope that we will not get sidetracked by nonrelevant or counterproductive, controversial amendments on a consensus bill that has been so long in the making.

I hope there will not be any frivolous amendments or amendments designed to kill the bill or message amendments trying to make political points rather than solve the problems we have regarding bankruptcy.

Let us pass this bill for the fourth and final time and get on to other business.

I urge all of my colleagues to support S. 256, the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

COMMENDING HOWARD BAKER

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, just before we went into recess on February 17, the distinguished majority leader introduced, and the Senate passed by unanimous consent, a resolution commending the public life of our dear former colleague, Senator Howard Baker. I did not have the opportunity to speak to this resolution then, and I wish to add a few words today.

I commend the current majority leader for taking a few moments from our busy Senate schedule that Friday to introduce and pass a resolution commending a former majority leader, my former colleague and dear friend, Howard Baker, for his lifetime of public service. All of us who know Ambassador Baker, or have had the great pleasure of serving under him, on either side of the aisle, will see this as certainly the least controversial act this Senate will pass this year.

I have known Howard Baker my entire Senate career—there are very few here who came to this body before Senator Baker did, back in 1966. And to know Howard Baker is to know consummate Southern grace and manners, to know a man who it is almost as much a pleasure to disagree with as it is to agree with. In my many years serving with Senator Baker, and under him, as my Republican Leader, when I first arrived, and as the majority leader, during the first 6 years of the Reagan administration, I had a few occasions where we stood on different sides of an issue, but many more where we did the people's business side-by-side. Our cause was always stronger when we had the intelligence and perseverance of Howard Baker on our side, and, on the few occasions where we did disagree, my arguments always had to be stronger because of the scrutiny and deliberation of my colleague's same intelligence and perseverance.

Majority Leader Baker did such a superb job during the first 6 years of the Reagan administration that President Reagan wisely chose him as his Chief of Staff for the last, often difficult, 2 years of his administration. It was a wise choice.

A few years later, Howard Baker made his own very wise choice. After being widowed, he married another one of our most distinguished colleagues, former Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum. I can honestly say that I have never seen a better collaboration between two Senators I hold in the highest regard.

As we all know, our distinguished former colleague's service to the Nation was not over yet. He served our Nation with great distinction in one of the most important ambassadorial positions we have, the United States Ambassador to Japan.

Mr. President, when they teach civics in our primary and secondary schools