

the urban fight” and “was used to engage both vehicular and personnel targets out to 1,400 meters.” It continued, “Soldiers not only appreciated the range and accuracy but also the target effect. Leaders and scouts viewed the effect of the .50-cal. round as a combat multiplier due to the psychological impact on other combatants that viewed the destruction of the target.”

Fifty caliber sniper rifles are sold not only to military buyers, they are also available to private individuals in the United States. Under current law, .50 caliber sniper rifles nearly identical to those described in the Army’s report can be purchased by private individuals with only minimal Federal regulation. In fact, these dangerous weapons are treated the same as other long rifles including shotguns, hunting rifles, and smaller target rifles.

I am a cosponsor of the Fifty-Caliber Sniper Weapon Regulation Act introduced by Senator FEINSTEIN, D-CA. This bill would reclassify .50 caliber rifles under the National Firearms Act, NFA, treating them the same as other high powered or especially lethal firearms like machine guns and sawed off shotguns. Among other things, reclassification of .50 caliber sniper rifles under the NFA would subject them to new registration requirements. Future transfers or sales of .50 caliber sniper rifles would have to be conducted through a licensed dealer with an accompanying background check. In addition, the rifle being sold would have to be registered with Federal authorities.

Adoption of the common sense Fifty-Caliber Sniper Weapon Regulation Act would help to ensure that these dangerous weapons are not obtained by terrorists and used against innocent Americans. We can, and must, do more to help keep military style firearms out of the hands of potential terrorists.

RURAL WATER SUPPLY ACT OF 2005

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, today, I join my colleagues Senator DOMENICI, BENNETT, DORGAN, MURKOWSKI, BINGAMAN, JOHNSON, and SALAZAR, in support of S. 895, the Rural Water Supply Act of 2005.

The Rural Water Supply Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to develop a program that ensures that a basic need—the need for a clean, safe, affordable, and reliable water supply—is not neglected. Overall, the bill will guarantee that the Bureau of Reclamation has sufficient authority to address the unique needs of rural and small communities in the West, and it will do so in a manner that respects the States’ primary role in water resources management.

The U.S. Census Bureau cites that 46 percent of Montanans lived in rural areas in 2000. These people and others in Western States deserve a safe, affordable, and reliable water supply—an essential component of a healthy life.

I look forward to working with my Senate colleagues to pass this important piece of legislation for not only Montanans but for all rural citizens in Western States.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2005

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

A gay man reported that an unknown man began to choke him and verbally harass him using antigay slurs while riding a train in Brooklyn. The assailant ran out of the train at the next station following the attack.

I believe that the Government’s first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

EASING THE CRISIS IN HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. ENZI. President, I rise today to speak to the ever worsening crisis of cost, coverage, and confidence in our health insurance system, but, more importantly, to outline what I believe to be several positive steps we can take in the near term toward relieving an impasse that has long stalled progress toward relief.

As I speak today, we are nearing almost 5 years of double-digit growth in health insurance premiums—increases that have repeatedly exceeded more than five times the rate of inflation. Since 2000, for example, group premiums for family coverage have grown nearly 60 percent, compared to an underlying inflation rate of 9.7 percent over the same period.

Not surprisingly, those hardest hit are America’s small businesses and those individuals outside of employer-provided insurance. These are the ones with the least market leverage and the weakest ability to pool risk. Already, among the very smallest of our businesses, those with fewer than 10 employees, only 52 percent offer coverage to their employees.

Mr. President, I am a realist. The most fundamental drivers of health care costs are ones that defy near-term solutions. These drivers include advances in costly medical treatments, Americans’ continuing appetite for such treatments, lack of transparency in pricing, and an antiquated third-party payment system that insulates

consumers from seeing the true cost of care they receive.

To take just one example, I—like many of my colleagues—would strongly support shifting much of our current tax subsidy of health insurance away from the employer and toward the individual. However, I fully recognize that any change on such a scale is, at best, years away.

And yet, like most Members in this body, I am hearing an ever growing chorus of concern from my constituents about health insurance—and most especially from small businesses.

America’s families and small businesses don’t want us to wait for the perfect solution or the perfect moment. They need real help, and they need it now.

Recognizing this increasing concern, and as the new Chairman of the Senate’s Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, I have made it a priority in recent months to seek the counsel of stakeholders, citizens, experts, and fellow Members of Congress on how we might come together on a package of insurance reforms we can realistically hope to enact in this Congress.

The most visible proposal now on the table—at least for the small group market—is the approach known as association health plans, or AHPs. Under this proposal, which was introduced in this Congress by Senators SNOWE and TALENT, qualifying trade associations would be permitted to band together their members for purposes of offering health coverage.

Association health plans hold significant promise—particularly in the pooling of risk, economies of scale, and market clout they could lend to thousands of small businesses.

At the same time, however, the AHP bills in their current form may also go too far in allowing some association plans to play by a separate set of rules than those governing the rest of the small group insurance marketplace, thereby tempting adverse selection and market disruption. Another concern is the fact that the current AHP proposals would shift primary oversight over many association plans away from States and move it to the Federal Government.

Regrettably, debate over these AHP pros and cons has hardened into a political and stakeholder stalemate—a stalemate that has helped block constructive action on new insurance reform for nearly a decade.

It is time we reached an end to this impasse.

Toward this end, I appreciate the hard work of Senators SNOWE and TALENT and other AHP proponents in working with me on possible compromise approaches. And similarly, I am encouraged by what appears to be a growing pragmatic spirit among traditional AHP critics such as insurers and State regulators.

Meanwhile, other of my colleagues, such as Senator DEMINT and Senators