

I understand the Government is trying to prevent drug stockpiling. But this rigid program requirement does not give doctors the flexibility they need to practice medicine. This is especially true in emergency situations.

So who is liable when a patient comes to the doctor's office needing immediate treatment but the doctor cannot help because he has to call the Government to send the medicine in the first place, even if he has a supply on hand for another patient? The program's current design has turned out to be a bureaucratic nightmare.

After only 3 months in the program, Randy Johnston wrote Medicare a letter begging—I say begging—to be let out of the program. Why? Well, it was not just the excessive paperwork and the excessive phone calls to get the medication; Randy saw how absolutely wasteful this Government program had become.

When Dr. Johnston purchased Medicaid vials himself from a local pharmacy, the local pharmacy would divide it into multiple doses that could be used for different patients. Using the new Medicare program, Dr. Johnston had to order an entire vial for each patient, use the one dose the patient needed, and then throw the rest away.

Why would Medicare force seniors and taxpayers to foot the bill for an entire vial of medication containing 400 doses when the patient only needed 1 dose? At a time when Americans are facing such painful financial times, this wasteful Government spending is appalling. We are talking about life-saving medicine, expensive medicine. I do not know anyone who buys a loaf of bread, takes out one piece and eats it, and throws away the rest of the loaf. This makes no sense to anyone.

It is well past the time that Washington bureaucrats start treating taxpayer dollars like the money in their own personal checkbooks. When emergencies, illnesses, or major household repairs occur in our families, we find a way to pay the bill. We look at our budgets, we tighten our belts, and we find alternative places to save. We eliminate luxury items. We stop wasteful spending.

Dr. Johnston was absolutely right to try to get out of this absolutely wrong, wasteful program. Washington bureaucrats who have never been on the front lines treating Medicare patients developed this program. They do not understand the practical applications. So I was not surprised when Medicare announced in September of this year they were putting the entire program on hold starting in January 2009. Washington bureaucrats claim they are considering alternative ways—alternative ways—to improve the program because they want it to succeed.

The new administration has a tremendous opportunity to learn from Randy Johnston and from the 4,200 other participating doctors. Rather than hamstring providers, perhaps Washington should start to focus its ef-

forts on eliminating waste, eliminating fraud, and eliminating abuse in the Medicare system.

This year alone, we have seen one news report after another uncovering Medicare wasting money. These news reports sound the alarm to every hard-working taxpayer in the sound of my voice and all hard-working taxpayers across America.

Who is holding these bureaucrats accountable? Just this week, the Department of Health and Human Services issued the Agency Financial Report. This document shows that in fiscal year 2008, these Government check writers made \$10.4 billion—\$10.4 billion—in improper Medicare fee-for-service payments. We can do better. We can do much better than this.

Wasteful spending strips Medicare of the vital resources that are needed to care for our elderly, to care for our frail, to care for the vulnerable. The new administration has a real opportunity to show leadership. Working together, we can fix this flawed policy. Medicare patients, doctors who take care of Medicare patients, and the American taxpayers deserve nothing less.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll of the Senate.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until the hour of 4 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 2:28 p.m., recessed until 4 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. McCASKILL).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will come to order.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

ECONOMIC STIMULUS

Mr. BYRD. Madam President, in September, the Senate considered a \$56 billion economic recovery bill, authored by Senator REID and myself. While the bill received 52 votes, the minority succeeded in blocking its consideration.

In the following 2 months, the economy has continued to deteriorate. On

Monday, Senator REID and I renewed our effort to stimulate the economy and help the millions of Americans hurt by the recession by introducing a \$100 billion economic recovery bill.

In response to higher unemployment, rising food costs, higher energy costs, State budgets in crisis, and increased dependence on foreign oil, President-elect Obama has called for passage of a second stimulus bill. I spoke with the President-elect yesterday, and I committed myself to helping the President implement his agenda.

Madam President, it is time to deliver to Main Street USA. S. 3689 is a \$100.3 billion economic stimulus package that would create over 635,000 jobs. I will repeat that. S. 3689 is a \$100.3 billion economic stimulus package that would create over 635,000 jobs. The unemployment rate now stands at 6.5 percent, the highest rate since March 1994. The unemployment rate is up by 1.7 percentage points since October 2007. The U.S. economy has lost jobs every month this year—a total of 1.2 million jobs, with almost half of the job losses coming in the last 3 months alone. New unemployment claims filed exceeded 500,000, the highest number since just after 9/11.

In order to respond to these grim statistics—and they are grim—the stimulus package extends unemployment benefits by 7 weeks in all States, as well as another 13 weeks in high-unemployment States. Thirty-seven States are facing a shortfall of over \$70 billion in their fiscal year 2009 budget, necessitating cutbacks in education, cutbacks in health care, and cutbacks in law enforcement.

The stimulus package includes \$37.8 billion—that is \$37.80 for every minute since Jesus Christ was born—to reduce the State's share of Medicaid costs by increasing the Federal share—increasing, I say—the Federal share by 8 percent.

The economic recovery package also—I emphasize the word “also”—includes a temporary increase in food stamp benefits. These funds—hear me now—these funds will be spent quickly, and they will help to stimulate the economy.

Over \$37 billion is included for essential infrastructure and investment programs. Now hear me, listen closely. I measure each word. There are consequences for failing to invest in America. For 8 years—8 long years—we have failed to make adequate investments in highways, transit systems, housing, in clean and safe drinking water systems, and in energy independence. This bill funds such investments, as well as small business loans, assistance for rural communities, and disaster relief for farmers hurt by the hurricanes and the floods this summer.

I understand, I am sorry to say, there is going to be an objection to debating this bill. This would be a mistake. I will say that again. I understand there will be an objection to debating this bill. This would be a mistake—a mistake. Why? Because it is time to act.