have a drug benefit as part of their health insurance coverage, access to these new medicines is beyond reach.

Even more alarming, it is estimated that 38 percent of seniors pay $1,000 or more for prescription drugs annually, while 3 in 5 Medicare beneficiaries lack a dependable source of drug coverage. This lack of reliable drug coverage for today's seniors is reminiscent of the lack of hospital coverage for the elderly prior to the creation of Medicare. Back in 1963, an estimated 56 percent of seniors lacked hospital insurance coverage. Today, after all our investments in health care and prevention, 53 percent of seniors still lack a prescription drug benefit.

The need for a Medicare prescription drug benefit is a top concern for the elderly and disabled in my home state of Rhode Island. Many seniors continue to be squeezed by declines in retiree health insurance coverage, increasing Medigap premiums and the capitation of annual prescription drug benefits at $500 or $1000 under Medicare managed care plans. Mr. President, seniors in my state are frustrated and burdened both financially and emotionally by the lack of a reliable prescription drug benefit.

While the need for a prescription drug benefit is clear and the desire on the part of some members of Congress is there, action on Medicare prescription drug legislation has been slow. The Senate Finance Committee has held a series of hearings on the subject of Medicare prescription drugs, however, the committee to date has been unable to produce a bill.

In May, I joined Senator DASCHLE and several of my Democratic colleagues, in introducing S. 2541, the Medicare Expansion of Needed Drugs Act. This legislation seeks to provide millions of elderly and disabled Americans with an adequate, reliable and affordable source of prescription drug coverage.

The MEND Act embodies the principles that I believe are necessary for an adequate prescription drug benefit—it is voluntary, accessible to all seniors, affordable, provides a reliable benefit and is consistent with broader Medicare reform.

Last evening, the Senate had a real and possibly its only opportunity to enact a prescription drug benefit when Senator ROBB offered an amendment during the consideration of the fiscal year 2001 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill that would have provided a universal Medicare prescription drug benefit to our nation's seniors. While the proposal differs slightly from the MEND Act, it embraced the principles that I view as necessary for a good benefit. Regrettably, this crucial amendment was defeated.

I sincerely hope that the stated desire of many of my colleagues to create an adequate and affordable Medicare prescription drug benefit will become a reality this year. During this time of strong economic prosperity, we should all feel compelled to seize this opportunity to strengthen and enhance Medicare for the new millennium.

HATE CRIMES AMENDMENT

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, as hate-crimes legislation was recently debated and voted on by the United States Senate, I would like to briefly explain my vote on this issue. I believe that all victims of crime, and most certainly victims of violent crime, are deserving of special status. After due process has been afforded and guilt determined, perpetrators of crimes should be punished speedily for the peace of the community and to bring some measure of resolution for the victim. However, creating different classifications of victims, and rendering punishment based upon such classifications threatens the notion of ''Equal Justice Under Law,'' the principle that adorns the United States Supreme Court building and should suffuse our entire legal system.

Violence itself, whether motivated by hate, revenge, greed, lust, envy, or some other evil motivation, threatens the peace of our communities and our citizens' sense of security. The Kennedy amendment would include minor crimes against property within the definition of hate crimes, but would not have included such heinous acts as the Oklahoma City federal building bombing, or the school shooting at Columbine High School, both of which left lasting, painful memories for the local communities in Oklahoma and Colorado, and even the Nation as a whole.

Rather than focusing on the particular motivation of the criminal, Congress and the states should provide law enforcement officials the resources necessary to fully prosecute all crimes. The diligent enforcement of existing laws will serve as an effective deterrent against criminal acts motivated by bigotry and hate, or any other distasteful compulsion. A more comprehensive strategy than what is embodied in the Kennedy amendment is warranted in light of the fact that in 1998 there were 16,914 murders committed in the United States (an average of 46 every day), and of the 16,914, only thirteen were deemed to be hate crimes.

I supported the Hatch amendment, which studies how extensive the hate crimes problem is and whether these heinous crimes are being fairly and aggressively prosecuted in the same manner as other similar crimes. I also welcome the Justice Department technical and financial assistance to states which need help in pursuing and identifying hate crimes. This is a far better role for the federal government than moving to federalize all state actions against hate crimes.

The Kennedy amendment also raised concerns by experts about constitutionality. Ultimately, it threatened to create more problems in the criminal justice system than it purported to solve, and I consequently voted ''no'' on the amendment and yes on the more reasonable Hatch amendment. I pledge to my constituents that I will support aggressive state prosecution of hate crimes, and I will continue to work to maintain safe communities, including actively supporting legislation that furthers that end.

INTERNET TAX MORATORIUM AND EQUITY ACT

Mr. BREAUX. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleague, Senator DORGAN, in introducing legislation designated to address the issue of Internet sales taxation.

As a consumer, I know first-hand how popular, simple and easy it is to buy items over the Internet. In fact, the Internet saved me at Christmas when I bought last-minute gifts for my wife, four children and our two little granddaughters.

But, as a member of both the Senate Finance and Commerce committees, I also know Congress has an obligation to examine how these same, tax-free Internet sales can financially harm businesses and state governments.

Senator DORGAN's bill balances the concerns of state and local governments with the importance of maintaining easy access to Internet services. It allows state and localities to enter into an interstate compact for the purpose of simplifying their sales tax systems for remote sales. Once 20 states have joined the compact, Congress can disapprove of their efforts. If Congress does not act, those states that have joined the compact and simplified their sales tax systems, will be authorized to collect sales tax on the purchases their citizens make over the Internet.

Our proposal, recognizing that collecting taxes must not be overly burdensome for online retailers, also provides a collection fee for all Internet retailers who collect these taxes. It ensures Internet purchases are not singled out for special tax treatment at the expense of neighborhood businesses, and state and local governments. This restores equality, a key aspect of any good tax system, without placing an unfair burden on anyone. I believe that this is a fair and equitable bill that takes reasonable steps to address the concerns of both online retailers and state and local governments.

We all agree Internet access should not be taxed, and that states and localities should not be allowed to impose discriminatory taxes on the Internet. In fact, Senator DORGAN's bill extends the moratorium on these types of sales for another four years.

But, I ask, is it fair to levy sales taxes on a person who buys a book from his local bookstore, but not his neighbor who buys that same book over the Internet?

I do not think it is fair. It isn't fair to residents who must pay the local

sales tax because they don't own a computer. It isn't fair to local retailers collecting the tax who must compete with Internet retailers who don't. And, it isn't fair to the states and their local governments that are losing money they need to fight crime and fires, and to give their children a quality education.

In Louisiana, sales taxes make up 33 percent of all revenues. Economists estimate that Louisiana could lose up to $172 million in state revenues by 2002 because Internet sales are not taxed. Other states are confronted with similar difficulties. When faced with these facts, it's no wonder two-thirds of Americans support Internet sales taxes.

The sales tax is not a new tax. It has been collected by states from their citizens for more than 100 years. It should be collected on all sales, regardless of whether they occur on Main Street or the information superhighway. I urge my colleagues to cosponsor this important piece of legislation.

Mr. CLELAND. Mr. President, I rise today in support of S. 2775. From the beginning of the debate on the Internet Tax Moratorium Act, I have fought for the sovereignty of state and local elected officials and a level playing field for on-line and off-line retailers. This bipartisan bill accomplishes both of these goals by allowing the states to work together in an Interstate Sales and Use Tax Compact to simplify and streamline the existing sales tax system in to a blended rate that will enable remote on-line and off-line sellers to collect and remit sales taxes without an undue burden. While states work toward this objective, the current tax moratorium will be extended four more years.

In addition to providing greater equity in the tax treatment of both Internet-based and Main Street businesses, this legislation also provides means for on-line retailers to pay their fair share in supporting the communities in which their employees and customers live. Local sales tax revenue contributes to the infrastructure and emergency services of these communities. Also of importance is the aid these funds provide to local education. If the high-tech community is truly looking to expand the domestic pool of eligible employees, they should be lauding this legislative approach because of the support it will provide the local, public school systems. Sales tax revenue will help educate the future programmer, software developer, or information architect for the virtual world of tomorrow.

As a former state official, I understand the important role state and local officials play in establishing public policy. Although Internet sales represent a small portion of overall consumer sales today, Net sales are increasing every day. Without a level playing field between on-line and off-line retailers, the forty-five states and the District of Columbia that collect sales tax could be crippled by the budgetary impact.

The Internet offers a more convenient means of purchasing goods. No longer do consumers need to fight traffic, search for a parking space, and deal with sometimes unhelpful sales people in order to purchase an item. This legislation would further ease on-line purchases by removing the confusing and often misunderstood use tax remission policies of states. The consumer would be able to take care of any tax questions in one transaction.

Some of my colleagues claim that applying existing sales taxes to the Internet will destroy this powerful news, information and commerce medium. I, on the other hand, do not see any signs of a slowing of the Net. It is growing so quickly that we are running out of Internet addresses. If anything, enacting this legislation now will enable new ''e-tailers'' to adjust their business design to adapt to this policy. In addition, this fear completely ignores the fact that these taxes are already due. They are not collected because it is too difficult.

The National Governors Association, the National Retail Federation, and the e-Fairness Coalition are among the groups that believe this legislation is a proper approach to level the e-commerce playing field. I urge my colleagues to join with this bi-partisan group in supporting the balanced approach of S. 2775 that accomplishes one of the main goals of the Internet Tax Freedom Act: to find a way to simplify the existing sales and use tax structure for remote sellers while the moratorium remains in place.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

CONGRATULATING ESTONIA ON THE EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY DAY

● Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, June 23rd marks the 80th anniversary of Voidhupuha, or Victory Day, recalling Estonia's break from Russian control in 1920. On this holiday, Estonians commemorate the battles during the War of Independence in which military forces fought to regain Baltic control over the region. On Victory Day Estonians also celebrate the contributions of all who have fought for the cause of independence throughout their country's history.

Many lives were lost for the cause of Estonian independence. Three battles, Roopa, Venden-Ronnenberg, and finally Vonnu were the turning points that ultimately led to the defeat of the opposing army. The Tartu Peace Treaty in 1920 marked the end of centuries of struggle and finally granted independence to Estonia.

On Victory Day, Estonians also remember those who battled against the Nazis and the Soviets. From 1944 until 1991 the Soviets again occupied Estonia, and during this time those who voiced opinions against the government were typically sentenced to 25 years in a Gulag prison, and 5 years in exile. The designation of June 23rd as Victory Day signifies that all those involved in the crusade for freedom are remembered for their efforts, and that their messages live on.

Estonia has become a strong independent country since 1991 when it again rid itself of Soviet occupation. It is a free-market economy and has established a rule of law.

This year we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the refusal by the United States to recognize Soviet domination of the Baltic states. The recognition of Estonia as free and independent is positive, but does not go far enough. What we celebrate this year is what we must help to preserve next year and the year after that. We must be sure that Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia are admitted into NATO as an unequivocal statement of the West's support for Baltic freedom and independence.

Being the son of a Lithuanian immigrant myself, I take great pride in the accomplishments of the Baltic states. I support admitting the Baltic states into NATO and I hope my colleagues here in the Senate will support their entry also in the next round of NATO expansion.

That debate we will save for another day, but I am sure all of my colleagues can agree on the importance of Estonia's struggle for freedom and independence, and will join me in congratulating Estonia on the 80th anniversary of Victory Day.●

THE BOSTON CELTICS' ''HEROES AMONG US'' AWARD

● Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, it is a special honor for me today to pay tribute to the forty-seven outstanding individuals who have received this year's ''Heroes Among Us'' Award from the Boston Celtics.

These honorees are men and women of all ages who have chosen different career paths. What they all have in common is the extraordinary contributions they have made to our community. They are role models for us all. They demonstrate the fundamental importance of the individual in our society, by proving that each person can truly make a difference. All of these heroes saw a need to achieve change or take other action in order to improve the lives of others.

This past season was the third season in a row that the Boston Celtics have honored one or more these heroes at home games for the special contributions they have made to our society. In those three seasons, the Celtics have honored 114 men and women with the ''Heroes Among Us'' Award, which is one of many programs that the Boston Celtics Charitable Foundation has initiated. The Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of the youths of New England through innovative outreach initiatives. The Boston Celtic