Many times, people in sports can come forward and spur a lot of folks to take seriously what politicians, such as ourselves, may not be able to impress upon them. So this meeting today was a good one.

TAX CUTS AND THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I also come to the floor today to talk about an issue that came up the other night during the course of the Presidential debate. I did a television show last night called ''Crossfire.'' Some people probably have seen it. It was typical. It was kind of a controlled shouting match, you might say, on ''Crossfire,'' with Republicans on one side and Democrats on the other. Mary Matalin, who is from Illinois, and has been quite well known for her chairmanship of the campaign for George Bush's election as President, was there representing the Republican side. Of course, we had Bill Press on the Democratic side. We talked about the debate.

The interesting thing to me was, the analysis of the debate by these commentators kind of came down to what I consider to be fairly superficial questions: Did George Bush show disrespect for AL GORE when he brought up the whole question about fundraising? Did AL GORE show disrespect for George Bush when he shrugged or was guilty of audible breathing?

I thought to myself at one point, is that as good as it gets in a Presidential campaign in America? We can listen to 90 minutes of debate and wonder if someone perhaps cleared their throat at the wrong time, or shrugged their shoulders, or someone else brought up a word or two that might have crossed the line.

I think it is worth a lot more for us to have these debates. I think it is important that all of us who are in this business—Republicans and Democrats—take it as seriously as the American people want to take it.

What I hear from people across the country is, we are looking for political candidates who speak candidly, honestly, openly, and truthfully. Tell us what you believe, even if we might disagree with it, so we can draw a conclusion about you, not just our ideas about you.

The issue that AL GORE came to the debate to talk about is one which was addressed a few moments ago by our colleague, Senator PETE DOMENICI of New Mexico. I listened carefully because I really respect this man. For years, when I served in the House of Representatives on the Budget Committee, and now on the Senate Budget Committee, I have watched PETE DOMENICI. He has gone after the deficit like a tiger and for years and years was admonishing Congress to cut spending, trying to bring down our deficit. He continues in that effort.

As a consequence, I wish he were here on the floor. I told him I was going to bring up this issue. I wish he were here on the floor so we could have a little debate about the proposed tax cuts of the two candidates, AL GORE and George Bush, and the impact it would have on America.

I think that is the point that AL GORE was trying to make the other night in the debate. There really are two clear choices. Both parties are for tax cuts, but they are entirely different approaches. The American people get to take their pick whichever they think is best for the future of this country and fairest for the taxpayers.

Frankly, I think the choice is very stark and very clear.

Let me show you, as an example, this chart, which demonstrates George Bush's proposal. It is true, we are at the point in our history where we are going to have a surplus; more money coming into the Federal Treasury than going out for the next 10 years.

The amount of that surplus will be somewhere in the neighborhood of $4.8 trillion—a huge amount of money. It sure is a far cry from just a few years back when we had, year after year, deficit after deficit. But, thank goodness, we are now living in an era of projected surpluses. We can start thinking about doing things with that money that will be good for the Nation.

The first thing you have to notice out of the $4.8 trillion surplus over the next 10 years is we have all agreed—Democrats and Republicans—that $2.6 trillion of the $4.8 trillion will not be touched. That is a surplus in the Social Security funds. We have said that is off limits. Nobody gets to touch the Social Security fund. So you start off with a 10-year surplus of $2.2 trillion, which I have indicated on this graph.

Then we take a look at the projection, first from George Bush, as to what you might do with that. Well, there will be a surplus as well in the Medicare trust fund, the hospitalization plan for the elderly and disabled, of about $360 billion. We think that should also be off the table. We should not touch it. We know Medicare won't last forever, and we want it to be solvent. So if you take away that amount, you are down to $1.8 trillion over the next 10 years.

Then, of course, you take the proposal of George Bush for tax breaks of $1.3 trillion, and you find that you have $500 billion left over the next 10 years.

Then George Bush has also endorsed other Republican tax breaks, such as the estate tax, the marriage penalty tax, the telephone tax, a whole variety of tax breaks which total $940 billion. Now we find ourselves in short order in the deficit category again. If you do all these things, you are back in the deficit world.

Then take a look at proposals by Governor Bush for additional spending on a variety of things—the military, education, whatever it happens to be—$625 billion, and that brings the deficit to a total of $1 trillion over the next 10 years. Then there is the proposal by Governor Bush that suggests we should privatize Social Security. That would cost $1.1 trillion. So add that to the $1 trillion, and now you have $2.1 trillion. With added interest costs of these additional debts of $400 billion at the end of 10 years, you started off with a $4.8 trillion surplus and now, at the end of it, under the George Bush plan, you have a $2.5 trillion deficit.

None of us wants to see a return to those deficits. So the alternative which has been proposed on the Democratic side by Vice President GORE suggests a much more reasonable approach: Start with the same $2.2 trillion, the non-Social Security surplus; protect the Medicare trust fund, $1.8 trillion; targeted investments, $530 billion. What is that for? Additional medical research at the National Institutes of Health, more money for our schools, environmental protection, cleaning up some of the environmental waste sites across America. Now add in the prescription drug benefit under Medicare, which we support on the Democratic side. You are now down to $943 billion.

Then we bring in our tax cuts, $480 billion worth of tax cuts, which I will describe in a few minutes. Then after you have reduced interest, you have a net of $310 billion on the plus side. You are not back in deficit land again. You don't see the red ink on this chart. You are still above the line. You still have a surplus.

The Vice President has suggested that we should put this in a rainy day fund because, frankly, all of these economic projections are just guesses about the future. If we guess wrong, we should have a rainy day fund for emergencies. The good news is, as we address this approach, by the year 2012, we will have eliminated, under Vice President GORE's proposal, the publicly held national debt in America.

What does that mean? It means that the debt being held by folks who own treasuries and securities in the Federal Government will have been retired. And if that is retired, then it means less competition for capital, lower interest rates, more opportunity for businesses to expand and families to borrow money for mortgages. It also means that our kids will not be carrying the burden of the national debt on their shoulders. I don't think we can leave our children a better gift. Those who would suggest that a tax cut is a much better deal miss the point.

The best deal is for us to eliminate the publicly held national debt, have targeted tax cuts, and end up with a surplus at the end. To find ourselves, as Governor Bush has proposed, running into all of this red ink from his proposals would be a recipe for disaster. We would not only still have our national debt, we would be adding to it. I don't think that does our kids and grandchildren any good whatsoever.

When AL GORE said repeatedly the other night that the Bush tax cut spends more for the wealthiest 1 percent than the total that he wants to

spend on education, defense, health and prescription drugs, that is exactly what the figures show. The tax cuts proposed by George Bush for the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans, $667 billion worth of tax cuts, are greater than the investments he wants to make in defense, health care, education, and prescription drug benefits combined. It is his choice. In this business of politics, it is a business of choices. I think it is important for us to reflect for a moment on the distribution of those tax cuts proposed by George Bush.

This was a point raised earlier by Senator DOMENICI. I am sorry that we didn't have a chance to be on the floor together so we could explore what we are talking about.

Who are the people who make the top 1 percent of income in America? They turn out to be folks who make more than $319,000 a year. That is $25,000 a month. I don't expect people to hold up their hands if they happen to be in that category. When you talk about those who need a tax cut, does it spring to your mind automatically that this is the first group we should care about, that 40 or 50 percent of all the tax cuts ought to go to people making over $25,000 a month? Boy, that sure doesn't calculate in my mind.

And the Bush tax cut, the average tax cut for those people making over $319,000 a year, is $46,000 a year. That is the Bush tax cut for the top 1 percent. You go down to people in the lower income categories and you see that it is small change. If you are making less than $14,000 a year, George Bush thinks you need a tax cut, too, $42 a year. If you are making less than $24,000 a year, it is up to $187 a year; under $40,000 a year, $453 a year.

As you look at this, you have to ask yourself a question: Is it really important for Members of Congress to feel the pain of the wealthiest people in America or perhaps to identify with a lot of middle-income and working families who are struggling with the necessities of life?

I come to this job believing that our responsibility isn't to the wealthiest. I think they are doing pretty well. America has been pretty prosperous for the last 8 years, more economic prosperity than at any time in our history. And it shows. People are living better. They are saving more. They are enjoying a better lifestyle. To think they need a tax cut at this moment in our history rather than to eliminate the national debt, rather than to provide tax cuts for people in lower income categories, is beyond me.

There are some interesting statistics, too, about what has happened to Federal tax rates since Bill Clinton and AL GORE took over. There was a statement made frequently by Governor Bush that he wants to cap the total Federal tax rate at 33.3 percent. He said no one should pay more than a third of their income in Federal taxes. That is an interesting proposal. But as you get into it, this is what it says. Let me give you an idea.

For middle-income families, since the Clinton-Gore administration took office, the total Federal tax rate has dropped to 22.8 percent, the lowest rate since 1978. So telling those folks we are not going to let your taxes go beyond 33.3 percent, they are already doing well. Tax rates are coming down. We want to continue to see them come down with more targeted tax cuts. For families with incomes of $24,000, the tax rate went from 19.8 percent in 1992 to 14.1 percent in 1999, the lowest tax rate since 1968.

So when the suggestion is made that the Federal tax rate won't be any higher than a third for anybody, it really goes back to the highest income categories. That is his shorthand version of saying: I want to give a tax cut not to working families but to people at the highest income categories. What George Bush is challenging is basically the idea of a progressive income tax, something that we really agreed on almost 80 years ago in America.

We said, if you are well off and you are doing better, you should pay a higher tax rate than people who are struggling to get by. Every President has gone along with that from the beginning, Democrats and Republicans alike. But the arguments coming from Governor Bush at this point suggest he doesn't believe that. He believes we should reduce the rate for the wealthiest people in the country and not provide similar tax relief for those who are in lower income categories.

It would be a virtual windfall, in terms of tax benefits, for some of the wealthiest people in America. Honest to goodness, should we be on the floor of the Senate and in the House dreaming up ways to make Bill Gates' life more comfortable? I don't think so. How about Donald Trump? I think he is doing okay. I watch the way he dresses and his lifestyle. I don't think he will need this $46,000 from George Bush. In fact, if he receives it, he may not even notice it.

When we talk about tax cuts on the Democratic side, we are talking about things that working families will definitely notice. Let me give you some ideas of the things we have come up with that we think are targeted tax cuts consistent with keeping the economy moving forward and helping everybody, not just a few. The Republicans criticized these, but that is what campaigns are about.

On the Democratic side we believe the No. 1 concern of working families is paying for their children to attend college. You can look at kids coming out of college who are $15,000, $20,000 in debt, and higher. Parents wonder, for goodness' sakes, how can we save up enough for this child to be able to go to college. I did a survey in Illinois. Over the last 20 years, college tuition in public and private universities in my State has gone up 200 to 400 percent. So it is understandable that there would be anxiety among parents as they try to think about how they are going to pay for college.

Well, Vice President GORE and the Democrats have suggested that up to $12,000 of college tuition and fees should be deductible on your taxes. You can't do that now. We think you should. That would be a helping hand to working families who want their kids to go to college and acquire the best skills, but they don't want them loaded down with debt when they graduate. It is simple, straightforward, honest, and popular. I have been across my State, which is split down the middle politically. I have yet to run into a crowd that didn't applaud that suggestion. They know, either through their kids or their own life's experience, that this is the sort of thing that works. I went to Rockford College in Rockford, IL, and I asked them, ''What is the average indebtedness of your graduates upon graduation?'' They said, ''It's $20,000 after getting out of school.''

If the Gore plan for education expense deductions were in place, that student would graduate with a debt of $4,000 or $5,000, instead of $20,000. And if you have accumulated college debt, you will be able to claim a tax credit for the interest that you have to pay on it. So I think that is the kind of targeted tax cut that makes more sense, rather than giving Bill Gates $46,000 a year, which he won't even notice.

Secondly, a lot of people are concerned about day care. I understand now with a grandson—and Senator REID and I were talking about our grandkids earlier. I have a 4-year-old grandson, and my daughter and son-in-law are concerned about quality day care and the cost of it. We want Alex to have the very best. But it gets expensive. A lot of families can't afford the best. So we give a tax credit for day care, but it is not adequate. It doesn't meet the need. A lot of families struggle and worry. They are hoping that the kids they pick up at the end of the day will be better off than when they left them, but they are never sure.

Wouldn't it make more sense for us to have a greater tax credit for day care? A lot of working families would applaud that. Kids in a better environment have a better chance to be healthy and safe and to succeed. So that is a targeted tax cut which has been supported by Vice President GORE and supported on the Democratic side.

A third one relates to long-term care. This is one that virtually all of us face as our parents get older and need additional attention. We may find, perhaps, that a visiting nurse, or some sort of convalescent care, or assisted living situation is the key for happiness for a person you love very much, a parent who has given you their entire lives. But it is expensive, and there are a lot of out-of-pocket expenses involved when a conscientious family cares for an aging parent or grandparent.

As the Democrats have proposed, I think a tax break for those engaged in

long-term care assistance for their parents and relatives is a sensible investment. Today, at a town meeting which we have every Thursday—Senator FITZGERALD and I—for visitors from Illinois, a young lady talked about her little boy who suffered from autism and how, after all of the efforts by the school district and her health insurance, she and her husband still had to borrow from relatives and take out of pocket to care for their disabled little boy. She said to me: Why in the world can't I get help under the Tax Code for that?

I think she is right. Doesn't it make more sense for us to make sure the Tax Code is sensitive to people's real needs in raising their families?

When these folks are making a sacrifice for their children, shouldn't we be there to help them along? That is the difference. On the Democratic side, we target the tax cuts as I have just described. On the Republican side, they say, no, we think the wealthiest top 1 percent in America should get 42.6 percent of the tax breaks; those making over $300,000 a year should get $46,000 a year in tax breaks. And, frankly, they disparage our approach as being ''too selective.'' Well, it is true; our tax cuts do go for specific purposes, but they are purposes with which real families can identify.

So when the debate started disintegrating into a question about who was clearing their throat, or shrugging their shoulders, or glaring at whom, I thought there is much more at stake in this election. I hope in the closing weeks of the election—and the Vice Presidential debate is tonight, and the Presidential candidates will debate on two more occasions in the next few weeks—we can get down to business here. I think there is a clear choice on so many issues.

I haven't mentioned prescription drugs, and I would like to do that for a moment. There is such a dramatic difference between the approach that George Bush proposed for prescription drugs and that by proposed by Vice President GORE. Did you know the Bush proposal, in the first 4 years, would depend on each State enacting a prescription drug benefit? That's right. Every single State would have to enact the law and do it their own way. That means just a handful of people will be assisted. In Illinois, over a million people might qualify for prescription drug help, but because of the way the law is written, only 55,000 actually do. It is limited to a certain number of diseases and certain drugs. Frankly, that doesn't do the job. As a consequence of that, you will have a lot of people left behind.

Governor Bush says for 4 years we will let the States take care of it, if they want to. Some States already have prescription drug benefit plans. Illinois is one of them, but Texas is not. So the State of Texas, where he is Governor, hasn't even enacted a prescription drug benefit plan. And now George Bush says we will leave it up to the States and they can show the initiative and leadership when it comes to prescription drugs for 4 years. Then, at the end of 4 years, things get very interesting under Governor Bush's plan. It is at that point he says we will take it away from the Governors in the States and put it in the loving and caring arms of a group which we know America trusts the most—insurance companies. Insurance companies.

So the decisions on the prescription drugs won't be made by doctors, nurses, or health care professionals. Once again, they will be made by clerks at insurance companies, who will decide which drugs they are going to put in their formulary, their accepted prescription drugs, and which ones they will not. They will decide the premiums and how much the copay will be. You will decide on your own how much help you will get. If you happen to be making a certain amount of money, you may not qualify for any assistance whatsoever. That is the George Bush plan. That is his approach. He says it gives you maximum choice. You get to pick your own insurance company. What a break. Then your insurance companies get to pick the drugs which you may be allowed to take.

Contrast that with the Democratic plan, supported by AL GORE. He says this ought to be a voluntary universal plan under Medicare. There is your choice. The private insurance companies versus Medicare. That is the choice I think a lot of people don't understand is really before us in this Presidential election. GORE believes in a prescription drug benefit under Medicare that is universal, voluntary, and available for everybody. Bush says to first give it to the States, let them work with it for a while, and then give it to the insurance companies and let them take it over. That is the choice. It is no choice at all. Under the Gore plan, the Medicare prescription drug benefit plan, your doctor will be prescribing your drugs. Medicare will help you pay for them. Under the Bush plan, the health insurance company will decide which drugs you can apply for and how much you pay in premiums.

I don't think that is much of a choice. I think back to 1965 when I was a student. I can remember the debate under Medicare. The Republicans opposed the creation of Medicare. It was Lyndon Johnson's idea that they called socialistic, the Great Society, so forth and so on.

Look at where we are today, 35 years later: A health insurance plan for the elderly and disabled which has lengthened the lifespan of senior citizens and which has brought dignity and independence to their lives. Medicare is a system they trust. When AL GORE suggests that prescription drug benefits should be under Medicare, seniors say: We feel at home with Medicare. We know how it works.

Do seniors who voluntarily sign up have to pay a premium? Of course, they pay for Medicare now. It is understandable. They will be making a monthly payment. But look at the peace of mind they buy for $50 a month. They realize there is a maximum amount they will have to pay each year for prescription drugs. If a medical catastrophe comes along, they know they are not out on a limb and unable to fill those prescriptions if they need to.

When it comes to tax cuts and prescription drug benefits, what a clear contrast between the two candidates for President of the United States. Elections are about choices.

Many of our friends on the Republican side of the aisle, frankly, who didn't have much of an inclination toward these issues are now discovering these issues. They are now newfound converts to the idea of prescription drug benefits. They have come up with a plan, which is interesting, about the reimportation of drugs after they have been sent overseas. You know a lot of drugs made in the United States go to other countries and they are sold for a fraction of the cost. The question is, can you bring them back into the country, buy them at a fraction of the cost in Canada and Mexico, and bring them back in the United States? I support it.

It really shows how far this system has disintegrated when the drug companies sell drugs in Canada for a fraction of what they cost consumers in the United States, where the drugs were developed with taxpayers' money through the NIH and inspection by the FDA and others.

This reimportation of drugs from other countries, as appealing as it sounds, can't possibly solve the problem. It is impossible to believe that American drug companies will just be shifting drugs overseas on a wholesale basis and expect Americans to import them back into the United States. At some point, they will slow down the sales overseas and they will take control of the situation.

The only real answer for a prescription drug benefit under Medicare is for the Medicare system to bargain with the drug companies for reasonable prices and costs for these drugs. That is really a key issue in this campaign and a key difference between the two candidates.

I know this is likely to come out tonight in the debate between our colleague, Senator JOE LIEBERMAN, and the former Secretary of Defense, Mr. Cheney. But I don't believe this is the end of the debate. I think it will continue on the Senate and House floor in the closing days and weeks of this session. Ultimately, the American people will be the judge. We have asked the American people in many polls which approach they prefer, and they say, hands down, that the Democrats understand Medicare, understand prescription drug benefits, and understand how to bring tax cuts that work for working families so that prosperity is there for everyone and not just a few.

(Mr. SMITH of Oregon assumed the chair.)

Mr. REID. Mr. President, before the Senator yields, may I ask the Senator a question? Did he say the top 1 percent of the people in the Bush tax cut get almost 50 percent of all the benefits?

Mr. DURBIN. That is correct.

Mr. REID. Did the Senator also say there are a number of converts during the last few months on issues that we have developed? Take, for example, the Patients' Bill of Rights. Isn't it true that in this body, on a straight party-line vote, there was a Patients' Bill of Rights in name only? The majority, the Republicans, passed a Patients' Bill of Rights. But is the Senator aware of what is in the Republicans' Patients' Bill of Rights that is good for the American people?

Mr. DURBIN. I can respond in this regard. I know the Republican so-called Patients' Bill of Rights was so good that the insurance companies approved of it and embraced it and endorsed it. Frankly, it is supposed to be a law that protects consumers against the excessive attitude and conduct of these insurance companies. Excuse me if I am skeptical, but this bill is endorsed by the lobby that is supposed to be fighting for the Patients' Bill of Rights. I smell a rat. Maybe I shouldn't use that term in light of the political campaign that is going on. I suggest perhaps that it not a real Patients' Bill of Rights.

Mr. REID. Is the Senator also aware that a Republican Member of the House of Representatives, a medical doctor from the State of Iowa, who looked at the bill we passed in the Senate, which the Republicans passed over objection, denigrated that bill? I repeat: Is the Senator aware that a Republican House Member from Iowa who is a medical doctor has stated that the bill passed out of here by the Republicans is bad?

Mr. DURBIN. That is Congressman GANSKE of Iowa. There was a bipartisan coalition in the House that endorsed the Democratic bill, the one that really works, the only one endorsed by virtually every medical group in America that understands patients ought to have the benefit of a doctor's judgment, not an insurance company's judgment, when it comes to critical health care.

They have created their own Trojan horse, this phony bill on the Patients' Bill of Rights. Honestly, I think the American people are going to see through it.

Mr. REID. I say to my friend from Illinois that it is possible to do work around here on a bipartisan fashion. That was demonstrated by Congressman NORWOOD, a Republican, and Congressman DINGELL, a Democrat. Congressman DINGELL is not a medical doctor. It is a good bill. Does the Senator agree?

Mr. DURBIN. It is a good bill. It is almost identical to the bill the Democrats had in the Senate.

I think the Senator from Nevada is also aware that we now have a new Member in the Senate from the State of Georgia who is committed to supporting our bill. We are now at a point where we believe that bill could pass.

Mr. REID. Is the Senator aware that we have not been allowed, through parliamentary maneuvers over here, to have a vote on the Patients' Bill of Rights? But we now have, obviously, a new Member who will vote in favor of it.

Mr. DURBIN. The Republican leadership in the Senate doesn't want to allow a vote on the Democratic Patients' Bill of Rights, almost the identical bill that passed in the House, because they know it would pass and it would be an embarrassment to them. The Democrats would win that battle. I don't think the people at home care whether the Democrats win or the Republicans win. They want families to win. This is an example where families would win, where you could have protection.

Let me give an example. I am sure the Senator is well aware of this. If a woman in the course of a pregnancy is going to her obstetrician, and because there is a change of insurance companies at her employment, she is asked to go to a different HMO, we provide that she can continue with the same doctor's care, in whom she has confidence, through the completion of her pregnancy. I think it is common sense and good medical judgment. I think both sides could agree on it. That is part of our Patients' Bill of Rights.

It says if you are going to the emergency room with a child, you don't have to check in the glove compartment, pull out the insurance policy, and go through it page by page to get the right hospital. It says if somebody at an insurance company makes a wrong decision and you lose your life or your health, they can be held accountable, as every business and person in America is held accountable.

Those are some basics in the Democrats' Patients' Bill of Rights. The Republican leadership does not want that issue to come to the floor because they now know we have the votes to pass it. They have blocked us every step of the way.

Mr. REID. Is the Senator also aware—which I am certain he is, but I would like to hear his response—that the Democrats' Patients' Bill of Rights is something unusual as far as this Senator is concerned, because we have the support of literally every organization in America: the AMA and the American Bar Association? I can't remember these two organizations ever agreeing on anything. Virtually the only organization that opposes this legislation is a health insurance company.

Does the Senator acknowledge that?

Mr. DURBIN. That is the reason a Patients' Bill of Rights hasn't passed in the Senate. It is not a question of what is right and popular, what the people want, and what health care professionals say will be best for the future of health care. It is a question of political muscle. The insurance companies have more political muscle in the Senate. They have stopped us from bringing this bill to the floor for a vote.

Shortly we will adjourn and go home with a lot of unfinished business. This is one of them. We came this close to doing it, but the Republican leadership said: No, we are not going to allow the Patients' Bill of Rights to come to the floor for a vote. That is an illustration of their insensitivity to what people in this country really care about: good health care. This Congress has not responded to it. In many respects, this Congress couldn't care less. That is sad because it is our responsibility, as representatives of the people of the States who elect us to listen to their needs and to respond to them. We have been totally unresponsive because of the efforts of the Republican leadership.

Mr. REID. If the Senator would also answer this question; it was brought up indirectly by the Senator's last statement. One of the things we have not done here is do something about campaign finance reform. As we are talking all over America, there are 30-second and 1-minute spots being run by this group, that group, the Democratic Party, Republican Party, and independent groups. The American public is beginning to get almost punch drunk as to who is advertising what.

Does the Senator think it would be one of the most important things we could do as a body and as a Congress to get this campaign finance problem under control, such as getting rid of soft money? Does the Senator think it would help the body politic to have campaign finance reform? We have been prevented from this by the majority.

Mr. DURBIN. The Senator is right. The efforts of our colleague, Senator RUSS FEINGOLD, and Republican Senator JOHN MCCAIN are well documented. AL GORE has said: As President, the first bill we will send the Congress is the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform. The first bill he will accept is a bipartisan bill to deal with campaign finance reform.

If we cannot come to grips with the abuses of the campaign finance system, several things will occur. The special interest groups, which rule the corridors of Congress and continue to rule the campaigns, will set the agenda; and secondly, many good men and women will continue to refuse to get into this business because they don't want to mess with multimillion-dollar campaigns, these attack ads that come from every direction, and the attacks on personal lives and reputation which have become so commonplace in negative campaigning.

It is interesting to me we have a bill so clearly bipartisan. The Republican Senator, JOHN MCCAIN, was very popular as a Republican candidate for President. In fact, he carried a few States in the Republican Presidential primary. Yet we can't even get that

bill to the floor for a vote in a Senate that is controlled by the Republican Party.

I think the American people see through this. I think they understand that this is not a fight over the Bill of Rights, it is a fight over the rights of Americans to be well represented.

Mr. REID. I say we need more people like the Presiding Officer. He has joined with us in many bipartisan matters. I hope the conversation we have had today does not in any way reflect upon the Senator from Oregon, who has worked with us on a number of issues. I am sure it has caused him a problem on the other side of the aisle.

The reason I mention that is everyone thinks McCain-Feingold is a bipartisan bill, and it is, in the sense that JOHN MCCAIN has stepped way forward on this to talk about the need for campaign finance reform. But the people willing to help him on the other side of the aisle, the majority of them, are few and far between.

On a number of issues we have talked about today, with rare exception, the Senator from Oregon has been willing to join in a bipartisan fashion to pass legislation. As my friend from Illinois has said, it is possible we could do this. All we have to do is what is right for the American people and get rid of these very high-pressure lobbying efforts—for example, the health insurance industry, which is preventing us from moving forward on something like a Patients' Bill of Rights.

Mr. DURBIN. At this point, I acknowledge my colleague, Senator FITZGERALD of Illinois, who also voted for the Patients' Bill of Rights. He has publicly stated he thinks it is the best approach. I think it takes extraordinary courage sometimes to break from your party on these issues.

The presiding Senator from Oregon has showed exceptional leadership and courage on the hate crimes issue. This was not an easy issue, I am sure, for him; it was not for any of us. He stood up on that issue. I will remember that for a long time. It was exceptional. We want to make sure we continue in that bipartisan spirit. I hope even in the closing days we might reach out and find some bipartisan common ground to deal with some of these important issues.

I see some of my colleagues have come to the floor, and they have been very patient in waiting for me to finish my remarks. I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary order before the Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are in morning business. Senators are permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I am following up on the Presidential debates of the other evening. I was thinking about what Governor Bush was saying about his Medicare plan. He was referring to Vice President GORE and saying: You are engaging in ''Mediscare''—''Mediscare.'' You are trying to scare the seniors.

The more I have looked at Governor Bush's Medicare proposal for prescription drugs, I have come to the conclusion that if his plan ever comes into effect, the senior citizens in this country ought to be scared. They ought to be scared about this.

Here is the difference between what Vice President GORE wants in terms of prescription drugs and what Governor Bush wants. In my right hand I have a Medicare card. Under the prescription drug policies of Vice President GORE, this is all you need to get your prescription drug. You have a Medicare card, you go to your doctor, he prescribes the drugs, you go to your local pharmacy, and you get your drugs filled. That is all you need—your Medicare card.

Under the Bush proposal, which goes out to the States, they have to pass legislation, and if you make over $14,600 a year, you get nothing. So in order to qualify for prescription drugs under the plan advocated by Governor Bush, you would basically have to meet all of the requirements for Medicaid in terms of showing your income, assets, everything else.

I want to put together the sheaf of papers you would have to fill out if you were an elderly person and you wanted to get prescription drugs under the Bush plan. This is what you would fill out. It looks like about 40 pages of paperwork. First of all is the tax return. You have to take that in and show them how much you made. Then you have to do all the documents, including instructions, applications, certificates, estate recovery—of course, if you have some estate and you have some assets. There is an insurance questionnaire. This is the type of paperwork you would be faced with under the Bush proposal.

Under the Gore proposal: One simple Medicare card.

I sum it up by saying what the seniors of this country want is Medicare; they don't want welfare. That is exactly what Governor Bush is proposing in his Medicare prescription drug proposal.

JUDGESHIPS

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, an issue I will be talking about every day is the issue of judgeships and the fact that we still have our judges bottled up, especially Bonnie Campbell, who has now been waiting 217 days to be reported out of the committee. Yet we just had some judges approved this week who were nominated in July, had their hearing in July. They were approved. But Bonnie Campbell still sits in the Judiciary Committee.

It is not right, it is not fair to her, it is not fair for our judicial system. Bonnie Campbell has all of the qualifications to be a judge on the Eighth Circuit. A former attorney general of Iowa, she did an outstanding job there. Since 1995, she has been the first and only director of the Office of Violence Against Women in the Department of Justice which was created by the Violence Against Women Act of 1994. Again, she has done an outstanding job.

There has been some good news. During that period of time, domestic violence against women, in fact, has decreased. But the facts are we have a long way to go. In 1998, American women were the victims of 876,340 acts of domestic violence. Domestic violence accounted for 22 percent of violent crimes against women. During those same years, children under 12 lived in 43 percent of the households where domestic violence occurred.

We have to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. Last week, the House passed by 415–3 the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. Again, I doubt they would have passed it so overwhelmingly if its only person charged with enforcing that law had done a bad job in running the office. I did not hear one comment on the House floor, nor have I heard one here, that in any way indicates that Bonnie Campbell did not do an outstanding job as head of that office. She did do an outstanding job and everyone knows she did. So now we're hearing that the Violence Against Women Act will be attached to something else and pass the Senate that way.

Yet perhaps the one person in this country who understands this issue and this law better than anyone else is Bonnie J. Campbell, who has directed that office for the last 5 years. We need people on the courts and on the bench who understand that law and can apply it fairly across our Nation. That is why we need Bonnie Campbell on the Eighth Circuit.

Right now we have quite a lack of women serving on our circuit courts. Frankly, the number of women on our circuit courts is appalling. We need more women on our circuit courts. And we need to confirm them here. Of the 148 circuit judges, only 33 are women—22 percent. That, in itself, is scandalous.

Bonnie Campbell should be added to that list.

Again, it doesn't seem right that Bonnie Campbell would get a hearing back in May and then remain bottled up in Committe. Lets go back to the presidential term of George Bush. During that time, every single district and circuit nominee who got a hearing—got a vote in Committee. And all but one got a vote on the Senate floor.

Yet we are not allowed to vote on Bonnie Campbell's nomination on the floor. So as I said, it is not fair to her. It is not fair to the judicial system. It is not fair to the advise and consent clause of the Constitution to hold her up.

Mr. President, I will again, today, as I will do every day, ask unanimous consent to discharge the Judiciary Committee of further consideration of this nomination.