

If you are a young person or a middle-aged person and you want to go out and buy a laptop computer today, for example, the odds are you are going to get a pretty good price on that computer, and the price of that computer will be substantially lower than it was a couple years ago. So for you, inflation for your expenditures on technology may well have gone down.

On the other hand, if you are a senior citizen, especially one who does not have a whole lot of money, how are you spending your money? Well, a very significant cost for seniors, obviously, is health care. For those needs Medicare does not cover, the truth is, health care costs, as we all know, are exploding. They are going up.

So if you are a senior, the odds are you are spending a lot more for health care out of your own pocket this year than you did last year. If you are a senior and you get caught in the doughnut hole of Medicare Part D, you are spending a lot of money because prescription drug costs, in many instances, are also going up.

So I think when we take a look at the COLA, we should understand the needs of somebody who is 75 or 80 years of age and how he or she spends their money, from an inflation perspective, is very different from somebody who is 18 years of age or maybe 40 years of age. But be that as it may, there can be no debate that millions of senior citizens today, in the midst of this recession, are hurting very badly. I think we would be doing a great disservice to them by turning our back on their needs and not making sure we are providing some financial support to them.

Therefore, I am asking my colleagues to join me in becoming an original cosponsor of the Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act, legislation I will be formally introducing on Thursday. Under this legislation, all Social Security recipients, railroad retirees, SSI beneficiaries, and adults receiving veterans benefits will receive a one-time additional check of \$250 in 2010. Since seniors living on fixed incomes are most likely to spend this money—whether it is on health care, whether it is trying to keep warm this winter—this legislation would provide a boost to our economy as it emerges from the economic crisis.

I very much appreciate that my colleague from Vermont, Senator LEAHY, is an original cosponsor, and I hope within the next couple of days we can have more.

For more than three decades, seniors have relied on a cost-of-living adjustment in their Social Security benefits to keep up with their increased expenses. Unfortunately, the current formulation for determining Social Security COLAs, in my view, does not accurately take into account the purchasing needs of today's seniors who often do not buy items such as laptop computers and cellular phones but spend, as I mentioned a moment ago, a disproportionate percentage of their in-

come on health care needs and prescription drugs.

The truth is, what we are proposing now is something very similar to what the Obama administration provided for in the stimulus package. This legislation we are offering is fully paid for by simply applying the Social Security payroll tax to household incomes above \$250,000 and below \$359,000 in 2010.

Under current law, only the first \$106,000 of earned income is subject to the Social Security payroll tax, thus a worker earning \$106,000 pays the same payroll tax as a CEO making \$300 million. This legislation begins to correct this inequity in 2010, while making sure seniors receive a fair increase in benefits next year. I should point out, in terms of this offset, no one in America earning \$250,000 or less would see their payroll taxes go up at all.

So I think this is an important issue. I think seniors all over this country are worried about their financial situation. They want the Congress to pay attention to their needs. I think the one-time financial support of a check of \$250, while not a whole lot of money, would at least help many people not see a reduction in their Social Security checks and would be of real help.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider Calendar Nos. 416, 417, 423, 424, 425, and 426; that the nominations be confirmed en bloc, and the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table en bloc; that no further motions be in order; that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; and that the Senate then resume legislative session.

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

The nominations considered and confirmed en bloc are as follows:

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Steven M. Dettelbach, of Ohio, to be United States Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio for the term of four years.

Carter M. Stewart, of Ohio, to be United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio for the term of four years.

Peter F. Neronha, of Rhode Island, to be United States Attorney for the District of Rhode Island for the term of four years.

Daniel G. Bogden, of Nevada, to be United States Attorney for the District of Nevada for the term of four years.

Dennis K. Burke, of Arizona, to be United States Attorney for the District of Arizona for the term of four years.

Neil H. MacBride, of Virginia, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia for the term of four years.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now return to legislative session.

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

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

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2010—Continued

AMENDMENT NO. 2366

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise to speak in opposition to the Wicker amendment, No. 2366, pending before the Senate on the THUD bill, as it is known around here—the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development bill. This is a bill which obviously includes Amtrak. Senator WICKER, of Mississippi, has offered an amendment which relates directly to the funding for Amtrak and whether it will be cut off.

The Senator from Mississippi says in his amendment he would cut off all Federal transportation funding for Amtrak in the next fiscal year unless Amtrak allows its passengers to transport guns in their checked baggage. This amendment would essentially impose upon Amtrak the standards for checking guns and ammunition that currently applies to airplanes. However, planes and trains have very different systems for handling checked baggage and different security concerns.

Let's talk about the effect of the Wicker amendment. Amtrak has said it is not ready to allow guns and ammunition to be transported in checked baggage. Amtrak doesn't have the security infrastructure, the processes or the trained personnel in place to ensure that checked firearms would not be lost, damaged, stolen or misused. Senator WICKER is imposing a new burden on the Amtrak train system in America—clearly an unfunded mandate—so some passengers—I don't know how many—can check firearms in their baggage. If this amendment becomes law, Amtrak would have to let guns checked in baggage onboard, regardless of the fact that they aren't prepared for this, or they forfeit Federal transportation funding that the railroad desperately needs to provide services to millions of Americans.