

subjective noneconomic loss, each defendant would be responsible only for his or her proportionate share of harm caused.

This amendment is fair and consistent with principles of individual responsibility. It will put an end to the gamble taken by the trial bar when they join everyone in sight of an injury.

Let me just say in conclusion, Mr. President, having chaired a number of hearings years ago as chairman of the Courts Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee, I had a hard time ever getting any plaintiff's lawyer to make a good argument in support of joint and several liability, because it is obviously not just. It violates any standard of American justice to require that someone who contributed little or nothing, just a little bit of what may have caused the harm, to end up getting assessed 100 percent of the damages simply because they are able to pay. That is not just. That does not have anything to do with civil justice.

It is astonishing to me, Mr. President, that our tort system in this country has evolved to the point where essentially innocent parties can end up being assessed all of the damages for a harm that they did not cause.

That is what the Abraham-McConnell amendment will be about when it is subsequently offered. I hope that I will be able to come back to the floor and speak again on this amendment at the appropriate time.

I wish to commend the occupant of the chair, the Senator from Michigan, for his great leadership in this tort reform field. He has been in the Senate now about 4 months, and I cannot remember anybody who has taken a subject and made a difference on it any more quickly than he has. I have enjoyed working with him.

We have another issue that we may be talking about later in the debate, something called an early offer mechanism, which I do not have the time to address at this point.

I just want to say how much I have enjoyed working with him. We are greatly in hope that the Senate will decide that changing the way we handle joint and several liability will be in the best interest of the American people.

Mr. President, I believe no one is about so speak. 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.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KYL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak as in morning business for approximately 2 minutes.

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

NOMINATION OF DR. HENRY FOSTER, TO BE SURGEON GENERAL

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I say to Members of the Senate, the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee has just a few minutes ago concluded its testimony from Dr. Foster, who is the nominee for Surgeon General. I wanted to take this opportunity to personally thank Senator KASSEBAUM, chair of that committee, for doing an outstanding job of giving Dr. Foster the opportunity to present himself to the Senate and to the United States of America. I felt that the hearing was very fair and very well conducted by both Senator KASSEBAUM and all the members of the committee.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to commend Dr. Foster who, for the last several months, has been a person we have only known as a cardboard cutout; who, in the last day and a half has, I believe, really presented a very strong image to this country of a man who is caring, who is compassionate, and who can be a very forthright Surgeon General, to speak to the issues of the day that are of concern to so many of us; who will be a person, I believe, who will speak to women's health care issues in a way that needs to be done in this country today; who will speak to the issue of teen pregnancy and provide leadership; and a man who I think is a person who we can all look up to in terms of being a model public servant; who understands that we cannot just sit in our houses and close our blinds and shut our doors, but we need to personally get out and work with young kids today and be a personal role model for all of them.

I think he has done an outstanding job of answering all the questions that have been brought to him, and I believe that both Dr. Foster and the committee deserve a debt of gratitude from the Senate.

I look forward to having an expeditious vote on his nomination and to being allowed, as a U.S. Senator, to vote up or down on his nomination very soon on the floor of the Senate.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

COMMONSENSE PRODUCT LIABILITY AND LEGAL REFORM ACT

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 600 TO AMENDMENT NO. 596
(Purpose: To provide for proportionate liability for noneconomic damages in all civil actions whose subject matter affects commerce)

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to lay aside the

pending Thompson amendment so I may offer an amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Michigan [Mr. ABRAHAM], for himself, Mr. MCCONNELL and Mr. KYL, proposes an amendment numbered 600.

Mr. ABRAHAM. I ask unanimous consent further reading be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

Strike out section 109 and insert in lieu thereof the following new section:

SEC. 109. SEVERAL LIABILITY FOR NONECONOMIC DAMAGES.

(a) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds that—
(1) because of the joint and several liability doctrine, municipalities, volunteer groups, nonprofit entities, property owners, and large and small businesses are often brought into litigation despite the fact that their conduct often had little or nothing to do with the harm suffered by the claimant;

(2) the imposition of joint and several liability for noneconomic damages frequently results in the assessment of unfair and disproportionate damages against defendants that bear no relationship to their fault or responsibility;

(3) producers of products and services who are only marginally responsible for an injury risk bearing the entire cost of a judgment for noneconomic damages even if the products or services originate in States that have replaced joint liability for noneconomic damages with proportionate liability, because claimants have an incentive to bring suit in States that have retained joint liability; and

(4) the unfair allocation of noneconomic damages under the joint and several liability doctrine disrupts, impairs and burdens commerce, imposing unreasonable and unjustified costs on consumers, taxpayers governmental entities, large and small businesses, volunteer organizations, and non-profit entities.

(b) GENERAL RULE.—Notwithstanding any other section of this Act, in any civil action whose subject matter affects commerce brought in Federal or State court on any theory, the liability of each defendant for noneconomic damages shall be several only and shall not be joint.

(c) AMOUNT OF LIABILITY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Each defendant shall be liable only for the amount of noneconomic damages allocated to the defendant in direct proportion to the percentage of responsibility of the defendant (determined in accordance with paragraph (2)) for the harm to the claimant with respect to which the defendant is liable. The court shall render a separate judgment against each defendant in an amount determined pursuant to the preceding sentence.

(2) PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY.—For purposes of determining the amount of noneconomic damages allocated to a defendant under this section, the trier of fact shall determine the percentage of responsibility of each person, including the claimant, responsible for the claimant's harm, whether or not such person is a party to the action.

(d) APPLICABILITY.—Nothing in this section shall be construed to—

(1) waive or affect any defense of sovereign immunity asserted by the United States, or by any State, under any law;

(2) give rise to any claim for joint liability;

(3) supersede or alter any Federal law;