

brehtaking technology. But it is also very expensive. In some ways, that is a sign of success, is it not? Thirty years ago, they would have been dead; dead, or in a wheelchair, or unable to see. The alternative? Remarkable, breathtaking achievements in health care and a Medicare Program that works. Expensive? Yes. Does it need adjustments? Of course. Should we make them? Yes.

But should we take from the Medicare Program substantial moneys so we can give a tax cut to some of the most affluent in the country? The answer, in my judgment, is no. That is not a choice that makes sense. That is not a choice that will strengthen this country or advance our interests.

We have about 2 or 3 months left in this session of Congress. The agonizing choices that all of us will make about what is important will be made, finally, in these appropriations bills and in the reconciliation bill. I come from a town of 300 people. My background is from a very small, rural community. I have no interest in being dogmatic or being an ideologue about one issue or another. But I do have a very significant interest in expressing the passion I have for the choices which I think are good for this country.

This country has to get out of its present economic circumstances, balance its budget, and make the right choices with respect to investments. I have not talked today about trade, but I will at some point in the coming days. We have to solve our trade problem. We are sinking in trade debt, and we are getting kicked around international marketplaces. We have to stand up for America's economic interests and change that. All of those things need to be discussed, debated, and resolved.

A lot of people wring their hands and grit their teeth because we have raucous debates about these things. These debates are good and necessary. I hope we have more and more divergent views brought to the floor of the Senate so we can understand the range of ideas that exist and select the best of them. Someone once said when everyone in the room is thinking the same thing, no one is thinking very much.

I do not shy from debate. I do not think it is unhealthy. But at the end of the debate, let us try to find out what is wrong in this country and fix it, and advance the economic interests to give everybody in America more opportunity in the future.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent there now be a period for the transaction of routine morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The Chair, in his capacity as a Senator from New Hampshire, suggests the absence of a quorum.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent I may proceed in morning business for up to 20 minutes.

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

TAX FARMING

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, yesterday, in the New York Times, on page 1, an article was written by Robert D. Hershey, Jr. I would like to extrapolate a few lines from this particular article, not only to bring it to the attention of our colleagues in the Senate, but also to bring it to the attention of the conferees who are now dealing with certain appropriations bills in conference at this time. That particular conference is certainly on the Treasury, Postal Service, and general Government appropriations bill.

There is stuck in this appropriation a sum of \$13 million. It does not sound like a lot when we start thinking about the billions and billions that we discuss on the floor of the U.S. Senate, but a \$13 million appropriation to initiate a program to utilize private counsel law firms and debt collection agencies in the collection activities of the Internal Revenue Service, as we know it, the IRS.

The first paragraph of Mr. Hershey's article in the New York Times yesterday states:

Congressional Republicans are poised to pass legislation requiring the Internal Revenue Service to turn over some debt collection to commercial interests, thereby giving certain private citizens access to confidential taxpayer information for the first time. . . . The Republican initiative, which would be limited initially to a pilot program, has raised alarms throughout the agency. "I have grave reservations about starting down the path of using private contractors to contact taxpayers regarding their delinquent tax debts," Margaret Milner-Richardson, the Commissioner of the I.R.S., said.

This was a statement written in a letter signed by Margaret Milner-Richardson, the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service.

For the last several years I have been one who has complained, I think fairly substantially and often, about some of the activities, and the heavyhanded activities, of the Internal Revenue Service. But I can say without reservation, this is an issue which Margaret Milner-Richardson, the Commissioner of the IRS, and myself, agree on 100 percent.

On the 12th of September, I, along with Senator ALFONSO D'AMATO of the State of New York, wrote a letter to the conferees relating to this par-

ticular conference, which is now in session. Senator D'AMATO and myself stated in the third paragraph, about this particular provision that now exists in the debate between the conferees—we wrote the following:

We are writing to express our concern regarding the possibility of inclusion of the House provision in the final bill and respectfully request your assistance to eliminate any provision allowing private bill collectors to collect the debts of the American taxpayer.

For over 200 years, when the Federal Government has imposed a tax, it has also assumed the responsibility and the blame for collecting [that tax]. In fact, we have an obligation to ensure that the privacy and the confidentiality of every American taxpayer is protected. Contracting out the tax collection responsibilities of government would be in contradiction of that duty, and would no doubt put the privacy of all American taxpayers in jeopardy.

Senator D'AMATO and myself continue by stating to the conferees:

While we are very concerned about the impact of the House provision on the rights of American taxpayers in their dealings with these private bill collectors, the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service has also raised serious questions about the provision. We, therefore, urge you to be persistent in your efforts to keep such a provision out of the final conference report.

The article, written in the New York Times yesterday, further States:

Such concerns are in spite of the bill's requirement that the private debt collectors must comply with the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and "safeguard the confidentiality" of taxpayer data.

Mr. President, I have seen a lot of ideas in some 17 years in the Senate. But I have never seen a worse idea, an idea that was so misdirected, in my 17 years of service, as one that is being proposed to become the law of the land.

I would like to pose, also—or at least to make an observation. This is not a new idea of basically farming out some of our tax collections to the private sector. But I would say, in over 200 years of our Federal Government, we have never turned over the business of collecting taxes to the private sector. But I must point out, as I did in a floor statement on August 4, in the U.S. Senate, that this is a dubious practice and it is as old as the hills, and it dates back to at least ancient Greece. This practice of private tax collection even has a name. It is called, "tax farming," and its modern history is chronicled in a book authored by Charles Adams, a noted lawyer and a noted history professor. The book is named, "For Good And Evil, The Impact of Taxes on the Course of Civilization."

In this book, Charles Adams recounts many tales of how the world has suffered under the oppression of tax farmers. He specifically describes the tax farmers sent by the Greek kings to the island of Cos as thugs, and even the privacy of a person's home was not secure from them. He further notes that a respected lady of Cos around 200 B.C. wrote, "Every door trembles at the tax farmers." In the latter Greek and