

Lack of systems to deal with the huge comprehensive care problems these folks face has resulted in the worst possible scenario; much money is wasted while many folks don't receive the type or quality of care they need.

Fortunately, there are a number of highly specialized programs called social HMO's or PACE programs, that provide coordinated care—using both Medicare and Medicaid bucks—for populations of these beneficiaries in less than two dozen communities. One of those programs, ElderCare at Providence Hospital in Portland, is up and running in my hometown, and it is serving these frail elderly at well below the national average cost for the so-called dual-eligibles.

Why don't we have more? HCFA currently requires each of these programs to apply on a waiver basis every time an individual community wants to start a social HMO or PACE program. This is expensive and time consuming, and it limits the reach of a very good, cost-effective system.

And again, something that takes about 5 minutes to start up in the private sector, takes about 5 years through the Federal Government.

For this group we must create greater access for highly specialized, dual-eligible programs by giving organizers clear and certain and uniform rules of entry through the Medicare Program; eliminate the so-called 50-50 rule, requiring 50 percent non-Medicare enrollment for any HMO serving Medicare beneficiaries, based on enhanced performance and quality standards; develop tougher restrictions on adverse risk selection making it harder for plans to deny enrollment to sicker, frailer beneficiaries; and set up a so-called outlier fund within Medicare, a special pool of cash fueled by reimbursement withholdings from overpaid HMO's, to appropriately compensate plans that demonstrate they are serving sicker, more costly beneficiaries.

Seventh, reform our Medicare supplemental insurance laws—the Medigap regulations—to guarantee that every Medicare beneficiary can enroll in a Medigap program at any time. I believe this change is crucial to encouraging more seniors to try HMO's, knowing that if they decide they must return to fee-for-service medicine they will be able to get back into Medigap coverage.

About a dozen States, including my home State of Oregon, already require guaranteed-issue. The Medigap market has not been destroyed in those States. There must be a universal Federal standard protecting beneficiaries.

Eighth, ensure better treatment and more appropriate treatment for Medicare beneficiaries by capturing the service and efficiency offered by telecommunications technology.

An important aspect of this is expanding the terms and conditions under which Medicare will pay for services via the fiber-optic lifeline, and working with both the Federal Govern-

ment and the States to knock down anticompetitive licensure practices and restrictions that hamper the ability of physicians and other practitioners to practice via this new technology.

I can tell my colleagues that Oregon, like much of the west, is looking hard at telemedicine as a way of getting better quality medicine to folks who live way out in the country; and there are lots of places falling under that definition, west of the Mississippi.

Medicare needs to help in that effort, not build walls against 21st-century medicine.

Ninth, Medicare must unleash the quality and efficiency promised by a rapidly growing cadre of alternative health care providers.

The program can save money and deliver to beneficiaries better, more targeted services by identifying and incorporating appropriate assignments for nurse practitioners, PA's, druggists, chiropractors, and other licensed professionals within the health care network.

Mr. President, these nine items are not the whole solution to modernizing Medicare. But I do believe that together, they represent an appropriate jumping off position for real Medicare reform that can be accomplished in this Congress.

I know colleagues from both sides of the aisle will be talking about their own ideas in the weeks and months to come. I urge them, I urge all of us, to move these issues through the congressional process beginning this year rather than expect a bipartisan commission to cure Medicare's problems for us.

Mr. President, tomorrow, I will go on to talk about other fundamental principles of Medicare reform.

I yield the floor.

Mr. CONRAD addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

DISASTER SUPPLEMENTAL, THE BUDGET, AND THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS TREATY

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, my State has been hit by a massive disaster over this last weekend. North Dakota has been hit with the strongest storm in over 50 years. This is a storm of staggering proportions. Mr. President, North Dakota this last weekend got hit by a combination of an ice storm and blizzard that is unprecedented in the last 50 years.

In North Dakota, we are used to harsh winters, but, frankly, we have never seen anything quite like this one. This most recent storm not only involved ice, it involved 70-mile-an-hour winds. That combination has knocked down power poles all across the eastern part of our State. As of yesterday, we had 80,000 people still without power in the State of North Dakota, many of them with no power since Saturday morning. The temperatures have been 40 degrees below zero wind chill since the heat went out.

Mr. President, we have story after story of people who are huddled in homes around stoves trying to keep warm. My scheduling director, who is from the small town of Warsaw, ND, has talked to her mother, who is over 80 years old. She has had no heat since Saturday.

Mr. President, this is a disaster of truly staggering proportions. In this storm, there were whiteout conditions for 10 hours straight—10 hours straight—where the snow was so heavy and the wind so strong, you literally could not see 5 inches in front of your vehicle. As I have indicated, all of this led to, first of all, a massive snowfall. In some parts of our State, it was as much as 24 inches. In much of the State, it was 17 and 18 inches. That is on top of record snowfall that we had already received. This is a headline from before this most recent disaster: "106 Inches of Snow and Rising." This is the Fargo Forum newspaper, the biggest newspaper in the State of North Dakota, and this was before the most recent disaster. Now we can put another 17 inches on top of that in the Fargo area. This was a record at 106 inches.

Mr. President, we have extreme hardship now across the State of North Dakota—no power, extremely cold temperatures, and facing us is the worst flooding in 150 years. The National Weather Service has now told us that we can anticipate the worst flooding in 150 years. That is on the heels of the most powerful winter storm in 50 years. It makes you wonder precisely what is happening with these weather patterns.

We have had an entire community ask to be moved to an emergency shelter—1,500 people. In one of the small towns in North Dakota, they asked to have the whole town put in an emergency shelter because there is no heat and has not been any heat since Saturday. We had a local rancher call in to the radio station, and he said, "My entire herd is out because the fences went down with this incredible ice storm and these extraordinary winds." He asked people who were listening to the radio, "If you see my herd roaming around, give me a call." I had another rancher call in from a town out in the western part of North Dakota, and he had a hundred cows and he had a calve crop coming in. Understand, this is the part of the season when you are calving. The calves are being born and being born in these disastrous conditions. They had a hundred cows, and they had a calve crop coming in, and they believe all of them are dead. They brought 10 into their own home—10 calves into their home to try to save them. All of them died. What was happening was, as the calves were being born, the wind is so strong, the snow is being forced up into their nostrils and the cows were suffocating. Now, if they didn't suffocate, they froze to death. Now, that is the extraordinarily brutal conditions that we are facing.

Mr. President, we had a disaster supplemental sent up by the White House before we had this 2-week break. I hope very much that the first order of business here will be that disaster supplemental. We ought to move that legislation and move it now. There is assistance in that legislation for some areas that have already been hard hit. There is further assistance for those that have been hard hit since that disaster bill was sent up here.

So I would ask respectfully of the leadership to get that disaster supplemental to the floor as quickly as possible. These are situations that cannot wait. These people need help. They need it now. North Dakota has been first in line to help out others when they faced disasters, and we have been happy to do so.

Mr. President, we are now faced with a staggering disaster and we need help. We are asking for it now.

Mr. President, I see there are other Senators wishing to speak. Will we be able to continue?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired, and it would take unanimous consent for the Senate to continue.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask for 1 minute more.

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

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, in addition to the disaster supplemental, I think we should also ask, "Where is the budget?" Because the budget contains items that are going to be critically important to dealing with these disasters as well. The budget was supposed to have come out of the Budget Committee by April 1. That deadline has been missed. The full Senate is supposed to act by April 15. I hope we don't miss that deadline as well, because this Congress is developing a reputation of failing to act.

Mr. President, finally, there is a third matter. That is the chemical weapons treaty. We have a deadline of April 29. That is when it goes into effect. Where is that piece of legislation?

Mr. President, I say to my colleagues that there are three pieces of business that we ought to do and do quickly.

The disaster supplemental ought to be first in line.

Second, the budget: We have a deadline of April 15.

Third, the chemical weapons treaty: We have a deadline of April 29.

All three of those ought to be taken up, taken up quickly, and passed so the people of this country know that this Congress is doing its business.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

Mr. JOHNSON addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If the Chair could interrupt the Senator, the Senator has an order to go into recess at 12:30. It would take unanimous consent for the Senate to extend that.

Mr. JOHNSON. I ask unanimous consent to extend morning business, Mr. President.

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

THE DEVASTATION IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I come to the Senate floor today to commend and recognize the strength and tenacity of the residents of my State of South Dakota, and also to further emphasize the importance of this body in expediting the President's request for supplemental appropriations for disasters occurring in the Great Plains and other parts of our country.

I returned to Washington yesterday after spending 6 days touring the devastation occurring in virtually every corner of my State. South Dakotans are a hearty stock and during my years serving the citizens of South Dakota I have repeatedly witnessed South Dakotans' ability to overcome any obstacle Mother Nature has given us. However, I don't believe I have ever seen South Dakotans rise to the occasion in quite the manner they are doing right now under extraordinary circumstances.

I traveled to South Dakota last week expecting to see widespread residual damage from the severe winter weather the State experienced over the past several months and subsequent high water from the ongoing snowpack melt. Relentless sub-zero temperatures and continual snowfall in January forced South Dakota Governor William Janklow to request a major disaster declaration from President Clinton to ensure roads could remain clear for emergency services and basic travel and access to livestock. President Clinton responded positively to the Governor's request and granted the declaration which gave the State additional tools to help meet its basic transportation needs.

Farmers and ranchers began facing hard times last fall with normally available grazing and unharvested row crops being buried with snow. The subsequent extreme cold increased the nutritional requirements of livestock and depleted winter feed supplies. This already tough situation became a crisis when the early January blizzards literally killed livestock and put most producers' livestock at risk because of access to feed being cut off. No one yet knows how many livestock were killed, but estimates top at least 100,000. In addition, many livestock suffered frostbite and were significantly weakened.

During this time, ordinary activities became extremely and increasingly difficult because of the excess snow. Wintertime expenses likely tripled as just getting livestock feed became a Herculean task. The continued stress on livestock, especially cattle, meant that the most important time of the year for ranchers—calving season—was approached with trepidation if not out-

right fear. Nutritional stress during late gestation makes for weak and dead calves.

I toured the State during this winter storm disaster and was struck by the dramatic impact, particularly in the northeastern region of the State, of the winter weather. Snowdrifts as high as buildings, roads with only one lane cleared with snow piled high on either side, homes without heat for days in the bitter cold, tens of thousands of dead livestock, schools closed for a week at a time, and the depletion of our indigenous wildlife populations were commonplace. I vividly remember watching a cow climb to the top of a snowdrift as high as the roof of the barn so that he could eat the shingles from the roof. And, I also remember the positive, stubborn attitude of the residents of South Dakota in the face of this disaster. South Dakotans knew that what they were facing was tough, but they also knew that they were tougher.

As if surviving the severe winter cold of December, January, and February was not challenge enough, residents and State and local officials knew they could not rest from fighting the forces of Mother Nature. Once all of the roads were cleared, emergency services were no longer threatened, and it appeared that the worst of the winter weather was over, focus turned to the next challenge: potential flooding problems the State could experience once the snowpack began to melt.

Governor William Janklow provided exceptional leadership with his comprehensive and aggressive efforts to get every community as ready as it could possibly be for the impending floods. Governor Janklow set up a state task force to monitor the flows of the rivers and to work with local governments in their preparations. State and local governments worked with the Corps of Engineers and the National Weather Service to predict precipitation and runoff levels, identify areas where additional flood protection measures should be undertaken, and design and implement additional flood control measures. The efforts made by communities were considerable. For example:

In Sioux Falls, the largest city in South Dakota, the Big Sioux River flood protection system was temporarily bolstered to hold up to 41,000 cubic feet of water per second. It was designed in the 1950's and 1960's to hold 24,000 cubic feet—5,600 in the main river channel in western Sioux Falls and 18,400 in the diversion channel in the northeast corner of the city. Sioux Falls also aggressively sandbagged and used over 60,000 sandbags in its efforts.

The small community of Davis filled and placed over 8,000 sandbags. Residents of the town of Hecla, population 400, built two dikes at the west and north ends of town to hold back the James River. In Aberdeen, the city built a levee about 2 feet high around the northern edge of the city in just 6 days.