

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I want to comment on the home health proposal that is before us and ask the Chairman of the Finance Committee to clarify his intentions with regard to addressing this issue in the next Congress.

The current home health interim payment system isn't working. Under the current system, those agencies that abused the system and milked Medicare for every possible reimbursement dollar are rewarded with generous cost limits. However, North Dakota agencies that did not abuse the system, that worked hard to keep their costs down, are penalized with unrealistically low limits. Not only is this terribly unfair, it creates a terrible incentive for efficient, low-cost agencies to go out of business and transfer their employees and their customers to agencies that have ripped off the system.

This system clearly penalizes North Dakota home health agencies and the beneficiaries who rely on their services. The median per beneficiary cost limit for North Dakota home health agencies is the second lowest in the country—a mere \$2150 per year. In fact, the agency in North Dakota with the highest limit has a cap that is below the lowest limit in the state of Mississippi. There is no rational basis for this sort of inequity.

Unfortunately, the proposal before us today takes only the smallest of steps toward correcting this inequity and leaves in place too many of the current incentives that favor high cost, wasteful home health agencies. I do not see how I can, in good conscience, go back to North Dakota home health agencies and tell them that we can only lift their payments rates 2 or 3 percent when agencies in other parts of the country will continue to have payment limits 3 and 4 times as high as theirs. It is not fair. It is not good policy. It is not good enough. For that reason, I will feel constrained to object to this legislation unless I can be assured by the Chairman of the Finance Committee that there will be an opportunity to do better next year.

Mr. ROTH. Mr. President, I thank the gentleman from North Dakota for his comments. He is right; this change is only a small step. It does not "fix" the interim payment system. However, in the time remaining this year, this is the best we can do. It takes an important step toward making the system more fair, and it reduces the perverse incentives in the current system. In addition, it recognizes that the Prospective Payment System for home health will be delayed, so it delays for one year the 15% cut in payments that is currently scheduled to go into effect on October 1, 1999.

I want to assure my colleague from North Dakota, however, that I fully intend to revisit the home health issue next year. At that time, I pledge to work with him and other members of the Finance Committee to see if we can

come up with a system that better addresses the needs of North Dakota home health agencies.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Chairman. With that assurance, I will drop my objection and let this legislation move forward.

#### ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 2130

At the request of Mr. GRAMS, the name of the Senator from Montana (Mr. BURNS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2130, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide additional retirement savings opportunities for small employers, including self-employed individuals.

#### SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 56

At the request of Mr. GRASSLEY, the names of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. NICKLES) and the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS) were added as cosponsors of Senate Joint Resolution 56, a joint resolution expressing the sense of Congress in support of the existing Federal legal process for determining the safety and efficacy of drugs, including marijuana and other Schedule I drugs, for medicinal use.

#### SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 108

At the request of Mr. DORGAN, the name of the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. WELLSTONE) was added as a cosponsor of Senate Concurrent Resolution 108, a concurrent resolution recognizing the 50th anniversary of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, and for other purposes.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### TRIBUTE TO INDIANA STAFF

• Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a group of people that have been of tremendous service to me during my tenure as a United States Senator. That group is my Indiana staff.

As I have so often said, whatever success I have achieved during my service as a Senator is greatly attributable to the tireless work of my staff. Their hours are long, and they toil in relative obscurity. However, they do so for the same reason that we as Senator make the sacrifice. They work so hard because they believe in this great nation we serve, and the ideals that are woven into the very fiber of our existence as Americans.

So much of our work here in the Senate focuses on legislative activity. For that is the stuff of headlines and news stories. However, it is hardly a reflection of one of the most fundamental responsibilities of a United States Senator, and that is providing caring and responsive service to the citizens of our state, the people who's trust we are charged with protecting and serving. And, Mr. President, it is those people serving in my State and regional offices that work so hard to insure that

the needs and requests of my Indiana constituents are met with friendly and effective service. They are the front line, they are my eyes and ears in Indiana, and without their hard work, it would be impossible for me to serve effectively.

As the distinguished senior Senator from Indiana pointed out yesterday, we have a rather unique operation back in Indiana. The senior Senator and I share a combined staff. They have served the state well. I would like to take a moment now to acknowledge my Indiana staff. Kathy Blane, Susan Brouillette, Sarah Dorste, Mark Doude, James Garrett, Amy Gaston, Michelle Mayer, Kevin Paicely, Lane Ralph, Karen Seacat, Libby Sims, Cory Shaffer, Angela Weston, Mike Duckworth, Barbara Keerl, David Graham, Pat McClain, Phil Shaull, Amy Hany, Tim Sanders, and Barb Franz. I believe I have included everyone. If I have not, let them know my appreciation.

As I have said, the distinguished senior Senator and I have shared staff, and so many will continue to work for the citizens of Indiana. Though some will go on to other endeavors, that same sense of responsibility and public service that has motivated them to date, I am sure will drive them to continue to play a positive role in the lives of Hoosiers for years to come.

I thank them and salute them. ●

##### TRIBUTE TO JUDGE JAN SMITH

• Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to an outstanding Nevadan, my friend and former colleague, Judge Jan Smith. At the age of seventy-one, after years of service as Justice of the Peace for the Jean-Good Springs community, Judge Smith will retire from the bench next year. I want to take this opportunity pay tribute to Jan for her efforts to improve the lives of so many Americans, because her accomplishments have helped us all.

I have been fortunate enough to be a first hand witness to some of Jan's incredible achievements. I have watched her rise from legal aide and working mother in the early nineteen sixties to become one of Nevada's most influential judicial officers.

After toiling away as a legal secretary for a District Attorney and a county judge, Jan became deeply involved with a variety of grass roots causes. She was one of the first women in the state to be an advocate on behalf of the environment. In the city of Henderson, she canvassed neighborhoods and city hall to prevent industry from inflicting permanent damage to the environment. As a mother of six, she was insightful enough to take action so that her children could grow up with an ample supply of clean air and water.

Judge Smith was also a champion for the underprivileged. She worked tirelessly to create opportunities for the poor and disadvantaged in Nevada. Like many of her contemporaries, she