

From my perspective, however, the most important change takes place in connection with a program that began last year designed to put more teachers in the classroom, especially more teachers in the classroom up through the third grade, a proposal that, for all practical purposes, could be used only for that purpose, whether more teachers in those primary grades was the primary need for each and every one of the 17,000 school districts in the United States or not.

I don't believe my State is different from many others. My great friend and frequent ally, the Senator from West Virginia, is on the floor. I suspect he has a greater percentage of school districts in his State than does Washington State that don't receive enough money under this program to hire one teacher because they are simply too small. So this bill, after an extended debate between the two sides in which one side said we have to continue the program entirely unchanged, whatever those school districts' priorities are, and our side that says we have to trust the school districts to spend that money for any educational purpose they desire—two rather dramatically opposed points of view—takes a halfway position between the two.

It states that the primary goal of this \$1.2 billion is to put more teachers in the classroom but that if school districts have other priorities or if they don't get enough money to do that for even one teacher, they can, in fact, use it for improving the quality of teachers they already have through more training or for some other educational purpose they believe is more significant than the top-down mandate in this bill.

I hope that will be appealing to the President of the United States. It does express at least a qualified degree of trust on the part of the Congress in the dedication and intelligence and knowledge of the men and women who run our schools, either as elected members of school boards or as full-time superintendents, principals, and teachers, to make decisions that will improve the quality of education of their children.

I have never been quite certain why it is that Members of the Senate think they know more about the needs of schools all across the country than do the people who make their entire careers out of providing that education, but that has been the net result of what we have done. This is a modest move in the other direction, a reflection of the fact that early next year, when we debate the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we will debate exactly that kind of issue: Who knows best what our young people need, we in Washington, DC, or those who run the hundreds of thousands of schools in the United States of America.

This bill also begins to keep a promise we made a relatively short time ago significantly to increase funding for health research through the National Institutes of Health.

This bill is a landmark in one other vitally important respect. As generous as this bill is to education, as generous as it is to health programs and to other programs included within it, it is a part of a pattern of 13 appropriations bills that spend almost \$600 billion in discretionary money in the course of the next year but do not touch the Social Security trust fund. Last year, for the first time in decades, we ended up with a budget that was not only balanced but in surplus to the tune of \$1 billion without touching a dime in the Social Security trust fund. We are absolutely convinced, I think most of us, that we should make the year 2000 the second consecutive year in which that takes place and keep on following exactly those same policies.

We can pass this bill and the other appropriations bills still unresolved without dipping into the Social Security surplus and without increasing taxes on the American people. That truly is a landmark. We thought when we passed the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, we might get to this point in 2002 or 2003. We got to it in fiscal year 1999.

This morning's newspapers printed excerpts of a speech by Alan Greenspan on the nature of our economy and on the fact that it has actually been growing more rapidly and is more robust than most of our statistics had indicated. Chairman Greenspan has made it very clear that actually balancing the budget and paying down the debt is a key factor in keeping the economy of this Nation moving forward.

We have a bill that I commend enthusiastically to all of the Members of this body. It is generous with education dollars, as it ought to be for one of the highest of all priorities in any society, the education of its future generation; it provides at least a modestly greater degree of trust in our professional educators and in our elected school board members with respect to how to spend that education money; it deals generously with our need for health research; and it is a part of a pattern that will continue the 1-year precedent of balancing the budget without invading the Social Security trust fund, without breaking the promises we have made not only to those who are retired today but those who are working today but will depend on Social Security in the future, that the money they pay into Social Security is for that purpose and that purpose only. For that reason, I highly commend this bill to the Senate of the United States and hope it is passed and approved by the President of the United States.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

THE PHONE BILL FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, yesterday, I introduced the Phone Bill Fairness Act. Consumers across this country have to deal on a regular basis with telephone bills, and one thing they do understand is that telephone

bills are very complicated and frustrating. But what they may not know is that telephone bills are, to them, more than just an annoyance—they may be costing them quite a lot of money. I want to address that issue very briefly.

When the average consumer receives their phone bill, they don't get a sheet of paper; they get dozens of pages, with very small type, filled with confusing acronyms, complicated payment schemes, and sometimes even services they have not signed up for at all but for which they are being asked to pay. I imagine most consumers not only don't understand everything they have received, but after reading a few pages into their bill—if they do that—they give up and just hope, so-to-speak, they are getting what they want.

Now, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was based on the idea competition and market forces would lead to lower prices and better service. We have begun to see the benefits of that act in certain respects. New companies and newly competitive incumbents have begun to reduce rates and offer innovative new services. That is to the good. The main beneficiaries of these improvements, however, have been business consumers. They have the expertise to analyze the bewilderingly complicated telecommunications market and to find out what are the best deals for them. That is exactly what they wanted because they have the size and scope to figure out what is going on and proceed to do what is in their best interest.

But your average phone user does not have a team of lawyers or accountants who can pour over his or her phone bill to determine the plan or the company that will save them the most money, which is what competition is about; thus, they cannot use the market system to their financial advantage. Unfortunately, phone bills become so complicated, and the array of services and phone plans so bewildering, that it really does take lawyers and accountants to understand and maximize the benefits that are intended.

So, on the one hand, the Telecommunications Act is working because it has created the opportunity for consumers to get lower rates and better service, but it is not working because it requires consumers to walk through a complicated and highly uncertain maze to finally get to that opportunity.

Once simple choices about telephone service have become so complicated that even the Chairman of the FCC, Bill Kennard, who was our foremost expert on telecommunications matters, himself has expressed frustration over reading his own phone bill, I think we have something we need to consider.

We may not be able to reduce the complicated nature of telecommunications competition, but at the very least we can provide residential consumers with a roadmap that leads

them through the maze of telecommunications. We must give consumers help, guidance, and be helpful to them in making sure they can understand their telephone bills and the options they have in telephone service so they can take advantage of the benefits of competition in the telecommunications world, just as businesses can do on a very regular basis.

Therefore, the Phone Bill Fairness Act tries to do this by the following:

First, we require all telephone companies to accurately describe charges that appear on bills. No one should be able to misidentify so-called line items, especially by claiming they are "federally mandated" when they are not federally mandated.

Secondly, our bill would require all telephone companies to tell their customers exactly what their average per-minute rate is for a month, so they can compare it to the rates of other companies. Is that so strange? Not at all. When a customer goes to a supermarket, they can look at unit prices for groceries and, thus, they can shop and compare. That allows them to buy what is best for them in terms of what they want, in terms of price and quality, and that is competition. Why can't we do this for telephone customers? The answer is, of course, we can.

Thirdly, we would require that all telephone companies inform customers of their calling patterns in an understandable way. If customers know what they are paying and know what types of calls are most frequent, they will then be able to compare all of the different company plans and find the one that is right for them. Again, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was about competition. This bill is about competition.

Finally, the bill gives the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission the power to explore how to make phone bills easier to read so that we don't do it here in Congress, and to determine whether any telephone companies are committing fraud in their billing practices. I don't mean to suggest this is the common practice, but there are some small phone companies that do something called "slamming," and that is fraud. They charge people for things they have not, in fact, signed up for. That is fraud. The best defense against fraud is an informed consumer. Consumers cannot be well-informed if they do not understand their phone bills. So this is all fairly logical and straightforward and, I think, in the interest of the Telecommunications Act and, more important, of the American people.

Consumers are terribly frustrated with how confusing phone bills are today. When consumers get frustrated, they assume the worst. I believe we have an obligation to try to do something about all of this, and I believe we can. I still very much believe in the Telecommunications Act. I voted for it and participated in shaping it. I believe

in the benefits of competition, but we need to make sure the benefits of competition reach everybody in the country—business consumers, residential consumers, and everybody. The first step to achieving this goal is making sure every consumer not only has the opportunity to get better rates and services but that they also have the knowledge and the power to actually get what they want at the lowest price.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DASCHLE. 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.

The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

Mr. DASCHLE. I thank the Chair.

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE ACT OF 1999

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, today I am introducing the President's new proposal entitled the Strengthen Social Security and Medicare Act of 1999. I send it to the desk.

It lays out steps we need to take to protect Social Security and Medicare for future generations. It has a number of key provisions that I will enumerate.

I look forward to the time in the not too distant future when I will come back with a number of our colleagues to talk at greater length about the importance of this bill and what it includes. It devotes the entire Social Security surplus to debt reduction. That is one of the most important features of the bill.

We recognize how critical it is that we ensure the viability of the trust fund for as long as we can. We also recognize it isn't mutually exclusive to want to extend the viability of the trust fund and pay off the public debt at the same time.

Therefore, what this legislation will do is first pay off all of the public debt. It will eliminate the publicly held debt by the year 2015, reducing the debt by \$3.1 trillion over the next 15 years.

It then devotes the entire savings, which otherwise would have been spent on the interest on that debt, to the Social Security trust funds. The real savings generated in the year 2011 alone, according to the Office of Management and Budget, will be \$107 billion.

This is a remarkable bill and one of which I am very excited to introduce. First, we pay off the debt; second, we dedicate to Social Security the interest that would otherwise have been going to pay interest on the debt. We not only have eliminated the public debt, we have lengthened the viability of the trust fund.

The President's plan extends the life of the trust fund in this manner by al-

most 20 additional years, to the year 2050. This extension of solvency is not conjecture. It is not something we wish will happen under this plan. Independent Social Security actuaries have confirmed this plan extends the solvency of the Social Security trust fund until the year 2050.

What a remarkable accomplishment. First, we will have paid off the publicly held debt; second, we will have extended solvency by 16 years.

We also do something else with this legislation. Obviously, it is important to extend solvency. But if the program is not reformed, we have not done enough. There are things we can do to strengthen and modernize another aspect of the entire retirement infrastructure we have in place today. That infrastructure has three legs: Social Security, Medicare, and private insurance, or retirement plans.

We will address private retirement issues in other legislation.

This bill addresses the two main governmental pillars of Social Security retirement: Social Security and Medicare.

It creates a real lockbox to further protect the trust funds both for Social Security and Medicare by extending the budget enforcement rules, including pay-as-you-go budget requirements from here on out.

There have been a number of debates on the Senate floor, and we talked in recent weeks about whether or not we are ever going to enact a lockbox. Unfortunately, the majority leader has chosen to fill the amendment tree—that is to preclude Democratic amendments in the debate on the lockbox; that has precluded our ability entirely to offer an amendment which says we ought not only lock up the Social Security trust fund, we ought to lock up the Medicare trust fund, too, because it, too, is a trust fund upon which our seniors depend.

This legislation includes a long-supported lockbox, but it also contains no trap door. The Republican version contained a trap door that allowed Social Security surpluses to be used for any purpose, including tax cuts, that could be labeled as Social Security reform.

There it is. In addition to ensuring we pay down the debt, in addition to ensuring we provide for 16 additional years of solvency, this bill provides a real lockbox without a trap door for Social Security and for Medicare.

I think it is important we set the record straight when it comes to this proposal. This has been the product of an extraordinary amount of work within the White House, within the administration, working with Democrats in Congress.

Republicans claim they have found religion when it comes to Social Security. The CBO clarified what is happening right now on Social Security with the letter provided yesterday. They said if the budget and the appropriations bills pass as are now contemplated and as are now drafted, we