A lot of our seniors average 15 prescriptions a year. The third case I have gone through this morning with seniors spending $294 in just a few weeks on her prescription medicines in Forest Grove is pretty representative of what we are hearing.

I hope that as a result of my coming to the floor over these last days before we wrap up for the year that we can see Democrats and Republicans in the Senate coming together to try to deal with this question.

I want to bring up one last case. It is a particularly poignant one. It is from an older person who is now taking 15 prescription drugs. She is on a fixed income with nothing but her Social Security. She is spending $600 a month—$600 a month—on her prescription medicine. None of it is covered by her health insurance. She writes to tell me that she is spending almost her entire monthly income on prescription drugs.

Think of that. A senior citizen, again, at home in Oregon spending almost her entire monthly income on prescription drugs. We asked: What happens when you can't afford the prescription drugs you need? She said borrow. That is what she tries to do. A senior citizen with only Social Security spending virtually all of her monthly income on prescription drugs is now having to borrow from friends and family.

I have a list of these prescriptions. Again, the list goes on and on.

This is an example of the kind of bills that senior citizens are now sending in as a result of our efforts to try to get bipartisan action on this issue.

I hope as a result of my remarks other seniors will, as this poster says, send in copies of their prescription drug bills. I hope they will be interested in the bipartisan Snowe-Wyden prescription drug bill. But, frankly, I would like to make sure they are in contact with all of us in the Senate because this is not an issue that should be allowed to be put off until after the 2000 election.

We are given an election certificate. Mr. President, I know you feel very strongly about important issues such as campaign finance reform where it is important to come together. We are giving election certificates to deal with these issues. I have not been given an election certificate to put this off until after another election. We are all sent here to deal with these important issues such as campaign finance reform and prescription drugs because these are important to the American people.

I am very proud to have been able to work with Senator OLYMPIA SNOWE on this issue.

I think when you are dealing with important questions such as prescription drugs and campaign finance reform it has to be bipartisan. My plan is to keep coming to the floor of the Senate day, after day, after day, bringing up these examples of what I am hearing from the Nation's senior citizens and hope that we can come together. Senator SNOWE and I got 54 votes on the floor of the Senate for the funding approach we are taking. More than $10 billion goes from the Medicare program each year to cover tobacco-related illnesses. We know we have to act. We have to act responsibly to address these concerns of seniors.

There is a marketplace-oriented approach to this problem. We don't need a lot of price controls. We don't need a ''one-size-fits-all'' run from a Washington, DC, program. The Snowe-Wyden bill will give seniors the same kind of bargaining power that a health maintenance organization has to negotiate prices, not through a government regime but through the power of marketplace forces.

I am going to keep coming back to the floor of the Senate until we get action on this issue. I will keep reading from these letters. I hope seniors will continue, as this poster says, to send in copies of their prescription drug bills. I know that seniors at home have made it clear they are going to keep sending them to me, and I am very hopeful that we can get action on this issue in this session.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 15 minutes.

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

(The remarks of Mr. BAUCUS pertaining to the introduction of S. 1837 are located in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROBERTS). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. THOMAS. What is the order of business, Mr. President?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The order of business is, under the previous order, the time until 2 p.m. shall be under the control of the distinguished Senator from Wyoming, Mr. THOMAS, or his designee. The Senator is recognized.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I will take a few minutes and talk about some of the things we are doing. Obviously, we are heading toward the end of this session. There is speculation as to when we will conclude our work. Of course, before that is done, clearly the most important thing before us is the appropriations process, funding the Government, and we will do that.

I had the opportunity this weekend to spend some time in my home State. I can always pick up things about which people feel strongly. They want to see the budget signed. There are differences of view as to what that budget should contain—legitimately, of course.

Most of the people in my State—and I certainly believe they are well informed because I agree with them—think we ought to hold down the size of the budget because that is how we really put some limits on Government. That does not mean we do not fund the things that are essential. Certainly we will not always have unanimity on what people perceive as being essential, and that is what it is all about.

People do want the budget signed. They do not want the Government to shut down, nor does anyone here, and I hope not the President. He has indicated he does not. We have about five bills to complete and get signed. I am optimistic about it. We will conclude our work without a shutdown. We will conclude our work without spending Social Security dollars, which was the commitment we made.

Out of the surplus this year—a surplus, frankly, for the second time in 25 years—we will only spend that money when it comes in the operational budget and not the budget of Social Security. More important, not only will we not spend Social Security money, but we also have a plan to strengthen Social Security for the future. To save Social Security is not enough. We must do that, of course.

The other thing I have heard—and I already mentioned it—is hold down the size of Government; we do not want the Federal Government to continue to grow and to be the dominating factor in people's lives. Indeed, there are essential elements of the Federal Government, but the strength lies in the communities, States, and counties of this country. The more decisionmaking that takes place there, it seems to me the stronger we will be and the closer we will be to the governed making the decisions, and the better off we will be.

We will do well. We will have to make some adjustments. One of them may well be an across-the-board cut of 1 percent. I happen to favor that idea. We are talking about a discretionary budget of about $595 billion. That is out of a total of about $1.7 trillion, the rest being mandatory. We are talking about actually below 1 percent, a .97-percent across-the-board cut, which is about $3.5 billion. That will bring us down to $592 billion. I cannot imagine that agencies with a budget of $15 billion or $260 billion are unable to find 1 percent that can be reduced. Generally, through things that are not terribly

important or some even considered to be wasteful spending, they can find 1 percent. In any event, I am very confident that can be done.

Some say it will require the military to lay off. The fact is, after 1 percent, it would still be a substantial increase over last year and over the President's request for the military budget. We are closing in on getting that job done. Certainly it is the compelling task before us.

It reminds me of one of the things I believe we ought to consider, and that is a biennial budget, so we can do this business of budgeting and allocating resources every other year, which has the advantage of giving agencies and the Federal Government a better opportunity of knowing what they will be doing for a longer period of time. But more important, it provides an opportunity for 1 year to do budgeting and appropriations and 1 year for oversight which, in my view, is equally important. It is important for the Congress to have oversight of the expenditures and to ensure these expenditures are implementing policies that have been passed by the Congress.

Most States do biennial budgeting and find it very useful, very satisfactory, and successful. I suspect there will be resistance, of course, from those involved in the appropriations process because it will eliminate 1 year in which they have perhaps extraordinary authority in the direction we will take. Nevertheless, I hope this idea is favored by the chairman of the Budget Committee and by the leader of the Senate majority. That is something we ought to consider.

As we talk to people at home, we ought to talk a little bit about the accomplishments of this Congress. I believe it has been extraordinary. It is a little difficult to keep up with it through the media's description of what we do; they don't like to talk about anything unless it is sensational; and also opportunities to communicate are very difficult. One of them is the budget.

We have a surplus—the first time in 42 years. Two years in a row, we have had a surplus. Part of that, obviously, is we have more revenue coming in and a strong economy. But equally as important—perhaps more important—is the balanced budget amendments that were passed 3 years ago that have kept down spending. At the end of the seventies and through the eighties, into the nineties, growth each year was in the neighborhood of 10 to 12 percent. In this year, it is just over 2 percent. Is it where we want to be? No. For many of us, it is not. Nevertheless, it is progress. We even have had, of course, a non-Social Security surplus.

Instead of spending at 10 percent, which we did in the early eighties, we are spending at 2.8-percent growth. That is pretty good.

Spending as a percent of gross national product has fallen during the nineties. Unfortunately, largely because of the President's tax bill in 1995, the percentage of taxes with respect to the gross national product has increased, the highest since World War II. Of course, we tried to do something about that. We passed a bill that would have been a reduction in taxes, but, unfortunately, the President vetoed it.

I mentioned Social Security and that we have to do more than simply talk about it. We can do that. Two years ago, President Clinton urged us to save Social Security first. Unfortunately, he has done very little since then, but there have been a number of things done here. Republicans have worked hard in seeking passage of a Social Security lockbox. Unfortunately, it has been filibustered on the other side of the aisle.

One of the most fundamental changes I hope will be considered next year and passed is the notion of having private accounts where people who are closer to the retirement benefit age will continue as they are. But people 25, 35, and 40 years old will have the opportunity to take the dollars they have contributed to Social Security and put them in a personal account, directly invested in equities, directed by the owner through an investment program, that will have several benefits. One, it would belong to the taxpayer. If, unfortunately, you were not able to utilize it before you passed away, it would be part of your estate. The second is, the return on the investment would be more substantially invested in equities than it would be invested as it is now in Government securities. That is the real direction we need to take.

Tax relief, of course, will be back again. It continues to be an issue. When you have taxpayers who are paying more into the Federal Government than is necessary to sustain the essential elements of the Government, then the money ought to be returned. It has been said—and it is probably true—that if dollars remain in Washington, they have a way of getting spent. So we ought to give some relief to taxpayers.

I was out last summer, in August, talking about the tax relief bill, and people sort of rolled their eyes about it because they had heard that before. But when you talked about the elements of it, they became very interested and supportive of it.

Estate taxes: For example, we have a lot of agriculture in Wyoming. Many agriculturists have almost all of their life's earnings in property, not in yearly income but in the estate they build up in that farm or ranch. Currently, they could lose nearly half of that through estate taxes. We would like to do away with those over a period of time.

Capital gains: More and more people are investing money in the market and seeking to take care of themselves for their old age security or to supplement their Social Security. We need to encourage that. One way to do that is to reduce the tax on capital gains.

The marriage penalty: Almost everyone would agree to the fact that a marriage penalty is very unfair, where two young people who are single at a certain wage level pay a certain amount of tax, but if they get married, they pay a higher amount of tax. That is not fair. We sought to change that. Unfortunately, as I said, that was vetoed. Nevertheless, I consider it to be an accomplishment for the Republican Senate because it sets the groundwork to move forward in another year.

Education: This budget we are talking about contains more for education than the President requested. He is arguing about that. The big argument is not the amount of money. The argument is because the President wants to dictate, to stipulate where the money goes—in this case for 100,000 teachers. We think it makes much more sense to be more flexible. If you have the money, send it to the States, send it to the school districts, and let those folks decide where it is most efficient to invest the money.

I have a strong belief that the needs in Greybull, WY, are quite different than they are in Pittsburgh. We ought to be able to adjust for that. I believe what we have done, in the case of education with Ed-Flex, is given local people more flexibility. So there is additional money in this budget for education. We had money in our tax bill to encourage education, as well. I am pretty pleased about that.

National security: We have added $17 billion for the defense of this country. Probably, if you had to select the item and the issue that the National Government is most responsible for—the Federal Government—it is defense. No one else, of course, can participate as fully in the defense of our country as the Federal Government.

Unfortunately, we have had more troop deployments over the last couple years than we have had in 50 years. But the administration has requested funds that would cause military readiness to go down. We have been in Haiti, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, and a number of other places, which has been very expensive. We have found ourselves in the situation, with voluntary Armed Forces, where it is difficult to recruit people to come into the military. Probably the more difficult thing is to retain those people in the military who have been trained to be pilots or mechanics, or whatever, who can find, of course, much better jobs somewhere else.

Health care: Clearly, health care is a vital interest to all of us. Again, folks in Wyoming are interested in that, in particular, because the changes that have been made over the last couple of years have affected rural areas probably to more of an extreme than nonrural areas. We are moving, of course, into an era where very small hospitals find it most difficult. We have some towns in our State with hospitals that have an average occupancy of one or two acute-care beds. That is

very difficult. And there are shifts taking place. We have changed the definition of ''hospital'' so that HCFA, the funding agency, can fund hospitals that have less than full services, even emergency rooms, to move those patients off to somewhere else.

We passed the Patients' Bill of Rights. I hope one of the things that will happen before we leave is some change in the balanced budget amendment on Medicare. That will probably be an additional $15 billion over 10 years, to take away what we think were the overcuts that have been made by the agency that pays it out. So we will be moving forward on that.

Financial modernization: I think for the first time since the 1930s the whole financial picture has changed somewhat. That bill is prepared to come to the floor. We closed the deal last week. We have been trying for 10 years—and finally got that done—to change the regulations that were put in place during the Depression times to fit what is necessary now.

So we have accomplished a great deal in the budget: Social Security, education, defense, tax relief, health care, and now a banking bill—all things that are good for America—but yet without letting the Federal Government grow out of control.

It is legitimate to have different views, and we ought to have an exchange of views. There are different views everywhere. One of the basic differences here has to do, frankly, with the size and involvement of the Federal Government; it has to do with spending. The liberals, of course, want to have more taxes, more spending, put the Federal Government into more things, override the States because they think that is a better way to do it. It is a legitimate point of view. I do not agree with it.

We ought to try to limit those things that can best and must be done by the Federal Government. Do we raise money to do it? Of course. But after that we ought to let that be done closer to the people.

Those are the real issues. Sometimes they do not show up. We get to talking about details, but the basic philosophy is there and it is legitimate and we need to work at it.

I hope we can move forward. I think we have completed a good amount of work this year. We have some more to do. We have probably less than 2 weeks to do it. So I hope we move forward.

I now yield whatever time he might consume to the Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. I thank the Senator from Wyoming.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Paul Barger, a fellow in my office, be granted floor privileges for the remainder of today's session.

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

The distinguished Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I appreciate very much the Senator from Wyoming taking the time to show some of the differences and some of the accomplishments of this session of the Senate. While I was watching him do that, it occurred to me that something else constantly needs to be brought up before the American people because a lot of times people look at Democrats and Republicans and do not realize that we do stand for different things.

In the case of the Republican Party, I have had the honor, since I have been in the Senate, of serving on the Senate Armed Services Committee. I originally discovered when I was in the House of Representatives—and it was a shocker—why there is such a difference in the approach to national security between the Democrats and Republicans.

To put it very bluntly, the Republicans have always believed that the primary responsibility of Government was to give America a more secure country and to promote our national security. Yet time and time again, it is quite obvious that there is a difference between Democrats and Republicans.

To document this or to quantify it, there is a group called the Center for Security Policy. I think this is kind of interesting because people need to know what we are doing here. All too often people will read the mail of their Senators and assume that is everything that is going on here, when, in fact, there are some things that may not be accurately expressed in that mail. For example, if a constituent is concerned with how his particular Member is voting on tax issues, the National Tax Limitation Committee and National Taxpayers Union rank us so they can tell who is for more taxes and who is for less taxes. If a constituent is concerned about what is happening in terms of family values, they have a number of organizations that will tell how Members voted on issues such as abortion. If they are concerned about how much regulation is disturbing people who are trying to run small businesses, the NFIB, National Federation of Independent Business, actually does a rating.

As far as national security is concerned, the Center for Security Policy is an organization that takes all these votes we cast having to do with a strong national defense, having to do with test ban treaties, a national missile defense system, defense spending, and they rank us to see who the good guys and the bad guys are in their eyes; that is, who is promoting a stronger national defense and is more concerned about national security or who legitimately believes there is a threat.

The average Democrat is ranked, in accordance with the Center for Security Policy, at 12 percent; the average Republican is 94 percent. That tells us something. It tells us there is a basic difference in the policy of the Democrat versus the Republican Party.

This is significant because we just completed debate on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and we heard a lot of dialog on both sides. To the last one on the Republican side who voted in opposition to this treaty, it was a recognition that there is a real threat out there. By unilaterally disarming, which is essentially what we would have done under the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, we would have allowed those nations to go ahead and test their nuclear arsenal, even though there is no way of verifying whether or not they were testing, of course.

Good old America, we do what we say we are going to do. If we say we will not do it, then we don't do it. I remember several times Secretaries of Defense would actually testify: We know we are not going to do it, but there is no way of knowing whether the other side is doing it. I had no doubt in my mind that both China and Russia would continue to test their nuclear weapons, even if they had ultimately ratified. By the way, they kept using the argument that we are going to have to ratify this because if we don't do it, Russia won't do it. I remember that same argument in the START II treaty. Russia still hasn't done it. We need to look at these things. Unfortunately, it does become a partisan issue.

In talking about our national defense, I come from the background of chairing the Readiness Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee. There is a huge issue taking place right now. I will make a couple of references to it because I have introduced a Senate concurrent resolution, with several Members who are cosponsoring it, which calls upon the President and the Secretary of Defense to reopen the Vieques training bombing range off the island of Puerto Rico.

This is what the range looks like. This is the island of Puerto Rico. It is about 22 miles from here to there. This part represents a live bombing range. It only constitutes 2.7 percent of the entire island.

This bombing range has been hot range active for 58 years. During the time period it has been active, there has only been one death on the ground as a result of the use of the range. That was last April 19. As a result, everyone in Puerto Rico who is running for office, whether it is for delegate or for the Governor of Puerto Rico, is using as his or her platform: We are going to do the most we can to shut down this range.

This is the range over here. It has been used for 58 years. There is live ordnance all over the range. There are protesters there right now, illegally trespassing, who are picking up and throwing around these live pieces of ordnance.

I have written twice to Janet Reno and told her she should go down there