

same amount of money but not make the decisions in Washington but send that money to the school districts. The school board in Tulsa, OK, is much better equipped to know what their education needs are in Oklahoma than we are in this August body of the Senate. The Democrats say the answer is not school buses, not computers, not the physical facilities that are available; it is 100,000 teachers. I think the more we can send these decisions back to the local level, the better the people of America will be served.

I believe we have had a good session. I am not pleased with the way it is turning out right now. The old saying we have heard so many times in the past that there are two things you never want to watch while they are being made—one is sausage and the other is laws—becomes very true during the last few days of legislative sessions.

I think we have done a very good job. I think we did the right thing in defeating the unverifiable test ban treaty. I think we have passed legislation of which America will be very proud. I am anxious to end all this fun we are having and go home and tell the people in Oklahoma about it.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be extended to the hour of 2 p.m. and that the time be equally divided in the usual form.

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

Mr. INHOFE. 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. HATCH. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that for the next quorum call the time be divided for each side equally.

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

Mr. HATCH. 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. WYDEN. 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. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes in morning business.

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

Mr. WYDEN. Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS FOR THE ELDERLY

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I have come to the floor of the Senate on a number of occasions recently to talk about the issue of prescription drugs for the elderly.

I think there is a particularly relevant point to make this afternoon given the very extensive press coverage we have seen on this issue in recent days.

Over the weekend, David Rosenbaum in the New York Times had an excellent article on the issue. In the last couple of days, Time magazine had another very lengthy piece on the question of prescription drugs for seniors. And both of these articles ultimately make the point that Congress probably is not going to be able to agree on legislation during this session. The authors offer considerable skepticism about the ability of Congress to come together on a very difficult issue. Both of them, to some extent, go off into what I think are secondary questions—the questions of the role of the Internet, and the question of patents on drugs. Those are important matters.

But what is central and what the Congress needs to do on a bipartisan basis is pass legislation that would make it possible for frail and vulnerable older people to get insurance coverage that would provide for their medicine.

For example, if you are an elderly widow who is 78, maybe having early signs of Alzheimer's, and you spend more than half of your combined monthly income of Social Security and pension on prescription medicine—those are the kinds of letters that seniors are sending to me—it is not going to help you a whole lot to get a 10- or 15-percent discount because you shop over the Internet. Certainly, the role of the Internet in prescription drugs is going to be important. There will be a lot of issues. But to provide relief for the Nation's older people, what Congress needs to do on a bipartisan basis is pass legislation that provides insurance coverage making it possible for older people to pay these big bills. Patent issues and the question of the Internet are matters that are important, but what is needed is legislation that provides real relief.

Part of the effort to win bipartisan support for prescription drug legislation is coming to this floor and, as the poster says, urging seniors to send in copies of their prescription drug bills. Send them to each of us here in the Senate in Washington, DC.

I intend to keep coming to the floor of the Senate and actually reading from these letters. I have three today that I think tell an important story.

One is from a senior citizen in Medford, OR, in my home State. Another is from a senior citizen from Grants Pass, OR, and a third is from a senior citizen in O'Brien, OR, all of which reflect the kind of concerns I know are out there. Hopefully, as seniors learn about our campaign and see that we are urging them to send us copies of their prescription drug bills, it can help bring about bipartisan support for legislation in the Senate.

I am very proud that I have been able to team up in recent months with Senator OLYMPIA SNOWE on bipartisan legislation. I have been of the view that nothing more can happen in Washington, DC, unless it is bipartisan. The Snowe-Wyden legislation is a bill that uses marketplace forces and unleashes the forces of the private sector in an effort to make medicine more affordable for the Nation's older people.

What is sad is that our elderly are in effect hit by a double whammy. Millions of them can't afford their prescriptions. Medicare doesn't cover medicine. It hasn't since the program began in 1965.

On top of the fact that seniors don't have Medicare coverage, when they walk into a pharmacy—I see our friend from New Hampshire, our colleague who has a great interest in health care. As he knows, when a senior walks into a drugstore in New Hampshire, Oregon, or Kentucky, and can't pay for their prescription medicine, in addition they are subsidizing the big buyers of prescription drugs. The HMOs and the health care plans are in a position to negotiate a discount. They get a break on their prices. The seniors, people who are spending half their monthly income on prescriptions, are, in effect, subsidizing those big buyers.

The bipartisan Snowe-Wyden legislation, fortunately, has been able to generate a lot of interest in the Senate. Senator SNOWE and I are proud to have the support.

For example, more than 54 Members of the Senate—more than half the Senate—are now on record saying they would support a tobacco tax to pay for prescription drug benefits for older people. That strikes me as appropriate.

Medicare spent more than \$12 billion last year picking up the costs of tobacco-related illnesses, and more than 50 Members of the Senate are now on record as saying they would be willing to support additional funding to help the vulnerable seniors from whom we are hearing.

Let me read a little bit from some of these letters because I think they sum it up. One I received in the last couple of days from Grants Pass says:

No way can I afford to pay for my medicine. I did get a refill on Pepcid.

That is an important medication this elderly woman is taking now in Grants Pass, OR.