

ideology. It is an issue that is important to the people in Rome and Watertown, Rochester and Brooklyn, and everywhere I have been in recent weeks. It will be foremost in my mind as the outlines of the 2002 budget take shape; that is, improving access to quality, affordable health care for New Yorkers, for all Americans, and especially for our children.

In this session of Congress, we will need to focus on many aspects of health care, medical privacy, Medicaid funding, genetic discrimination, providing prescription drug coverage for our seniors, and long-term care for our families, among others. Today I will talk about the importance of insuring more Americans, particularly our children, and protecting the rights of those who are insured.

In all corners of New York, I have met countless people who have told me powerful stories of the cruel inequities of our health care system. Last August, at the Dutchess County Fair, a single mother told me how hard it was to keep her family afloat because her medical bills totaled more than \$30,000. She was worried she would become impoverished and forced to go on welfare.

In Massena, an uninsured woman suffering from cancer told me how much trouble she had finding a doctor who would treat her for free. In the MonteFiore Children's Emergency Room in the Bronx, I saw children who had come there for asthma treatments because they had no health coverage and, therefore, no doctor of their own. From Buffalo to Bay Shore, the people of New York have urged me to go to the Senate to fight for better health care.

Many of my colleagues will remember when I came to Capitol Hill 7 years ago with an idea or two about how to improve health care in our country. At that time, I was privileged to work with the Acting President pro tempore's father, who served not only Rhode Island, but our entire country so well for so many years. We were not successful then, but I learned some valuable lessons about the legislative process, the importance of bipartisan cooperation, and the wisdom of taking small steps to get a big job done.

The Clinton-Gore administration took such steps, and with the help of both Democrats and Republicans we made progress: the Kassebaum-Kennedy Health Insurance Portability and Protection Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Children's Health Insurance Program, the help we gave to young people leaving the foster care system under the Chafee bill—to give them eligibility for Medicaid health coverage through their 21st birthday, ending drive-by deliveries, mental health parity, helping to prevent breast cancer by waiving cost sharing for mammography services in the Medicare program—and providing annual screening for beneficiaries age 40 and older, advances in federally funded medical research, and the human genome project.

Even with such progress, however, there are still 40 million Americans who are uninsured. Adults with health insurance are three times more likely to receive care when they need it. People with no health insurance are 50 to 70 percent more likely to be hospitalized for routine illnesses such as pneumonia. Children with no health insurance are twice as likely to be hospitalized for illnesses such as asthma and ear infections. Americans without health insurance are 4 times more likely to seek care in emergency rooms.

It has only been 3 months since my election and 6 weeks since I was sworn in, but already I have received hundreds of letters from New Yorkers urging me to help them, their families, and their neighbors get the care and coverage they need. One such letter is from Kevin Pispisa, a Boy Scout from Troop 207 in North Babylon, whose parents are nurses. Kevin wrote to me:

It seems that the poor working class do not have the means to receive adequate health care. Some of them cannot afford to go to the doctor or pay for medication that they need.

Elsie Doetsch from Binghamton wrote to tell me about her friends who are dairy farmers. She is concerned about them because, as she writes in her letter to me:

They work every day to help put the food we eat and enjoy on our tables, yet cannot afford the "luxury" of health insurance, which I feel is a necessity for anyone in their hazardous occupation.

These letters serve as an important reminder to us all as we think about President Bush's tax cut plans and as we deliberate over the shape of our new budget. We must not forget to invest in the people we represent. We must help them find affordable quality health care. Health insurance should not be a luxury; it should be a fact of life for Americans everywhere.

Let me be specific. We should expand the Children's Health Insurance Program. If we change the poverty threshold to include children and families with annual incomes up to 300 percent of the national poverty level and extend the program to parents of eligible children, we can provide health care to more than 5 million parents and nearly 2 million more children. Merely expanding CHIP, however, is not enough. We need to do more to encourage the enrollment of the 7 million children who are eligible for CHIP, or Medicaid.

I am very pleased that in New York, CHIP outreach efforts include radio PSAs in a number of languages, from Greek to Russian to Albanian to Creole to Chinese. We should provide a financial bonus to States that meet CHIP enrollment targets and reduce the CHIP-enhanced matching rate for States that fail to do so.

There are other creative ideas to provide greater access to health care for all Americans. As we consider them, I believe we should adhere to certain principles. First, we must develop policies that cover more uninsured Ameri-

cans without encouraging businesses to drop or reduce their employees' health benefits. Second, we should make improvements to our health care system without setting up burdensome new Federal or State bureaucracies. Third, we should not penalize States such as New York that have been leaders in expanding coverage. Fourth, we should encourage flexibility for States to expand coverage while enacting strong accountability provisions so that taxpayer dollars are effectively invested.

As we work to expand health care coverage, we must also work to improve the quality of coverage. That is why it is past time to pass a meaningful Patients' Bill of Rights, and I am very pleased to be a cosponsor of the McCain-Edwards-Kennedy Patient Protection Act of 2001.

President Bush recently set out his principles for a Patients' Bill of Rights, and this legislation meets every one of them with only one exception: The President wants to preempt State laws that allow people to seek relief in State courts when they are injured by bad HMO decisions. That objection should not stand in the way of progress. I believe President Bush can transform the rhetoric of leadership into the reality of accomplishment by embracing this bipartisan patient protection act. Across this aisle and across our country, Democrats and Republicans are joined together in support of this Patients' Bill of Rights. Say the word, President Bush, and we can make this bill a law.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on improving the health of our Nation in the context of a budget that is balanced and prudent.

I would also like to take this occasion to pay special thanks to my predecessor, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, whose legacy of service to New York and our Nation is unparalleled and who has always been a source of inspiration, not only to me and my colleagues but to people literally around our world.

Finally, I am so grateful to the people of New York who have given me this extraordinary opportunity to serve them. Over the course of the next 6 years, I will work hard each and every day to listen to their concerns and to fight for their futures.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

SENATOR CLINTON'S MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I congratulate the Senator from New York on her first official speech here in the Senate. I particularly appreciate her focus on health care, a subject about which she knows a tremendous amount. Of course, she will make a great contribution in the Senate.

THE TAX CUT

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I want to take a few moments to talk about the proposed tax cut that is, of course, the main focus of a lot of our attention in the Congress since the President sent us the tax cut proposal this last week, and give some thoughts as to my perspective on it at this point. I am sure that perspective will evolve as we get closer to actual consideration of the bill on the Senate floor. But I wanted to talk about how I see it at this point.

I think there are four obvious questions we need to ask about this tax cut proposal. First, should we have a tax cut? That may be the easiest question for all of us, but it is a legitimate question. Second, is the President's proposal the right size of tax cut in total, his \$1.6 trillion proposal? Third, is it structured appropriately in order to accomplish what we want to accomplish for our economy? The fourth obvious question is, does the President's proposal constitute a fair distribution of the benefits from this proposed tax cut?

Let me take a few minutes to deal with each of these. First of all, should we have a tax cut at this point in our Nation's history? To me, the answer is clearly yes. We can afford to have a tax cut because we are now projecting substantial surpluses, whereas most of the time I have served in the Senate, we have been dealing with deficits, not with surpluses. But we now have a surplus and a projected surplus; therefore, we can afford a tax cut.

Second, if we do properly structure this tax cut and do it quickly, pass it quickly and send it to the President for signature, it could stimulate the economy at a time when our Nation may need a real stimulus, perhaps as early as this summer or early this fall.

Those are reasons why I believe a tax cut is appropriate.

The second question I posed was, was the President's proposed \$1.6 trillion the right size of a tax cut at this time.

I have some real doubts about that. And my answer has to be at this stage based on what I currently know and what I think all of us currently know. I think the answer has to be that it is not the right size; it is too large.

The answer to the question has to be no. We should downsize the proposed tax cut before we enact anything here in the Senate.

Why do I say this? Let me give a few reasons.

First, there is a tremendous amount of uncertainty at this particular point about where our economy is headed. Last Thursday I saw a report in the New York Times reporting that many States expect a reduction in their State sales tax receipts, indicating a slowdown in sales. Of course, the States are much more dependent upon sales tax receipts than the Federal Government.

Many States that were awash with cash a few months ago now are pre-

paring for budget cuts. They are seeing their projected surpluses at the State level evaporate as they see the expected revenue coming in from these sales taxes to be reduced. At the same time, the administration and the Federal Reserve Board are warning about a slowdown in the economy. I know Chairman Greenspan is speaking again today. I believe he testifies before the Banking Committee, and I imagine that he will, once again, make the point that he made to the Budget Committee a couple of weeks ago, which is that we have a very slow growth economy at this particular moment; there has been a substantial downturn in economic activity.

All of this adds to the uncertainty, as I see it, and gives us more reason to hold off on locking in a very large tax cut until we get a better sense of where we are.

A second reason is, when you look at the numbers and the size of the projected tax cut, you have to become concerned about, if we go with this large of a tax cut, whether we will have the funds necessary to pay down the debt.

The remaining actions people in my State tell me they would like to see us take, if we have the funds, are a prescription drug benefit and increased defense spending.

President Bush is going to military installations this week talking about how we need to put more into national defense. The question is, Can we afford that if we go with this very large tax cut, and increased funding for education, and for a variety of needs that we have in this country?

I thought the best exposition I have seen and the best description of the problem and the best reasoned argument against the size of the tax cut was in the New York Times op-ed piece that Bob Rubin, our former Secretary of the Treasury, wrote. I thought it was extremely insightful. Let me read a paragraph.

He says the serious threat of the proposed tax cut to fiscal soundness becomes apparent when you look at the numbers a little more closely. The surplus of \$5.6 trillion as projected by the Congressional Budget Office is roughly \$2.1 trillion after deducting Social Security and Medicare surpluses; as many Members of Congress in both parties have advocated, making realistic adjustments to better represent future spending on discretionary programs and tax revenues.

He says we have a \$1.2 trillion surplus that we are talking about having available for a tax cut. He said since the proposed tax cut would cost \$2 trillion, or \$2.2 trillion if an alternative minimum tax adjustment is included, it would entirely use up the remaining surplus with no additional debt reduction. That leaves nothing for special programs that already have broad support—such as the prescription drug benefit, or greater increased defense spending for a missile defense system, or other purposes, or additional tax

cuts, all of which are sure to happen this year, or over the next few years.

These spending increases and the additional tax cuts could well cost between \$500 billion to \$1 trillion leading to a deficit under this analysis of the Congressional Budget Office projections.

My answer to the second question has to be that we cannot afford this size tax cut.

The third question that I posed is what the President's proposed tax cut should be to accomplish what we want for our economy.

Again, I think the answer has to be no.

The reality when you look at the President's proposal is that this tax cut is not intended or designed or structured to provide tax relief to anyone in the near future. It is instead intended and designed and structured to provide tax relief in the distant future.

The administration has argued that we need this tax cut to give the economy a boost at a time when we most need it, and when our economy most needs it. But the truth is, it provides absolutely no tax relief in 2001. It provides only \$21 billion of tax relief in the year 2002.

The tax cut proposal we have been sent by the President is backloaded. It is a much, much larger tax cut in future years—5 or 10 years from now—than it is this year. In fact, there is no tax cut this year as proposed by the President. In my view, the structuring of this tax cut as well as its size is flawed.

The final question that I believe needs to be asked, and undoubtedly will be asked and answered many times in different ways by all of us, is, is the President proposing a fair distribution of the benefits of the tax cut.

Again, my answer has to be no. The proposal the President sent us is heavily weighted to help those with higher incomes.

I was reading a magazine that arrived at our house last night—the U.S. News & World Report. They had a chart depicting how benefits from the Bush tax plan stack up. I was just trying to analyze that chart.

They take a single person, with no children, with a \$25,000 adjusted gross income and then they go up to \$300,000 adjusted gross income, and a married couple with one spouse working and two children. They go through a variety of possible taxpayer situations and try to analyze how much actual tax relief will be available.

According to their calculation, under the Bush plan, an individual who is earning \$25,000 a year adjusted gross income, would get \$60 in tax relief the first year that this is in effect. That would be 2002. You get a \$60 cut in your taxes.

If you take the person who has a \$300,000 income, what about their situation? They would get \$25,679 in tax relief that first year.

You say: Well, what is wrong with that? A person with an income of