

"Has to be phased out," he said. That was a statement by Senator SANTORUM, a Republican leader, in the New York Times on May 21.

What the Republicans will bring us in terms of prescription drugs is really the first and critical step toward phasing out Medicare. It is their belief that Medicare should be eliminated and replaced with private insurance coverage, but most American families know, if they have been at the mercy of a health insurance company, that, frankly, that is not a very wise tradeoff, nor a very fair one. That is why we come down to some fundamental differences between Democrats and Republicans when it comes to prescription drugs.

We on the Democratic side believe that a prescription drug benefit should be part of Medicare; that it should be a voluntary program; that there should not be any coverage gaps; that there should be reliable coverage all across America; and that we ought to lower the cost of medicine for everyone by ensuring access to generic drugs.

On the Republican side, they have serious gaps in coverage in prescription drugs. If you are paying for prescription drugs on a monthly basis for a serious illness and expect to pay for it throughout the course of the calendar year, there are periods in the beginning when Republicans would protect you for a short period of time and then long periods of months when there is no protection whatsoever before your bills get so huge you qualify for catastrophic coverage. That is not very much protection for a family or a sick person.

They also, on the Republican side, will force seniors out of Medicare and into unreliable HMOs where seniors will not be able to choose their own doctors. Do you remember the debate we had over 10 years ago about the future of health care in America? Wasn't one of the serious issues we talked about one's ability to choose one's own doctor? The Republican approach on prescription drugs, the suggestion we privatize Medicare, that we move people into HMOs, will take away the ability of seniors to choose their own doctors, their ability to choose the doctors they trust. That is pretty fundamental.

Also, the Republicans suggest spending billions to privatize Medicare and turning this over to big insurance companies. Have you spoken recently to someone who has had to deal with health insurance companies, the rates they charge, and the conditions on coverage? I have; I sat down with small business people in Illinois. I find it absolutely scandalous what is going on. These insurance companies are cherry-picking. They are deciding who they will insure and who they will not insure. They are deciding the length and duration of coverage and the type of coverage.

If you, during the course of the calendar year when you are covered, turn in any claim relative to any part of your body or any illness, you can vir-

tually bet that next year, when you go to sign up for health insurance, it will be excluded; you are on your own. Is that the kind of coverage which we want to see in America?

The Republicans say that is a choice; we are giving people a choice. Let me tell you, Mr. President, the seniors of America have chosen for over 40 years the right choice, and that choice is Medicare. Medicare is a system which protects all Americans. It is a system with low administrative costs. It is a system which has worked. It has worked because the life expectancy of seniors has increased. It has worked because hospitals across America provide benefits to seniors. That is what is at stake in this debate.

I say to my colleagues who argue this is just a question of choice, it is the wrong choice. The best choice is to stick with Medicare, to stick with protection.

In closing, I wish to speak about cost. There will be those who come to this Chamber and say: You Democrats and those who support a plan under Medicare have to understand how expensive it is.

They will say, you do not understand the expense of your proposal. I wish those same critics could remember the debate just 2 weeks ago on the Senate floor when the Bush administration came in and asked for us to provide over \$350 billion in tax breaks for some of the wealthiest people in America. Two years ago, that same administration asked for over \$1 trillion worth of tax breaks for the elite investors in America. The money was there for tax breaks for the wealthiest people in America but, sadly, when it comes to providing health insurance coverage, when it comes to prescription drug coverage, time and again the same people who voted so willingly for tax breaks for the wealthy will not come up with the dollars necessary for real prescription drug coverage that will cover our seniors across America.

That is what this debate is about, the future of Medicare, a fair program to protect all senior citizens and to provide for cost of prescription drugs.

I yield the floor.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have spoken to the majority leader and the Democratic leadership when they were both in the Chamber, and I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 11:30 today, and that at that time we go to the Defense Bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Connecticut.

THE NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND CULTURE ACT

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, just before the Memorial Day recess, the distin-

guished Presiding Officer and I had the great honor of introducing bipartisan legislation, S. 1157, to create a National Museum of African American History and Culture within the Smithsonian Institution.

We were joined in that effort by 44 of our colleagues, and I might point out that another four have joined since that time, bringing the total number of cosponsors to this legislation to 48. I presume before the day is out we will have a clear majority of our colleagues who endorse the legislation introduced by the distinguished Senator from Kansas.

Senator BROWNBACK and I introduced similar legislation in the last Congress and I am pleased that we have such strong continuing interest from our colleagues, ensuring this important museum be created.

This long overdue legislation will guarantee that the compelling stories and invaluable contributions of African Americans to our Nation will finally be shared with all Americans, indeed all peoples of the world.

This legislation also allows us to publicly display the contributions of African Americans to the founding of our Nation and educate students of all ages about the importance of their experience. This museum is not intended to replace the numerous museums and institutions of African American culture and history that already exist in our country. Instead, it will bring a national focus and prominence to the contributions and experiences of African Americans.

In New Haven, CT, for example, we are fortunate to be the home port of the 19th century freedom schooner, Amistad. The recreated Amistad is a floating classroom and reminder of the devastating effects of the transatlantic slave trade. Amistad America is dedicated to promoting the legacies of the Amistad incident of 1839 and to celebrating and teaching the historic lessons of perseverance, leadership, justice, and freedom experienced by African Americans during that incident, and similar ones like it during the centuries before 1839.

It is my hope, of course, that organizations such as Amistad America and numerous others will be able to work with the Smithsonian to ensure that these important stories may be told. I am pleased that we have been able to provide support for these numerous organizations and associations, such as Amistad, in this bill as well.

During my tenure as chairman of the Senate Rules Committee, I was pleased to work with colleagues to pass legislation to establish the Presidential Commission on the National Museum of African American History and Culture action plan.

In April, the Presidential commission issued its report in which it documented the voices of African Americans across the Nation, calling for a national place to tell their individually collective stories. This long overdue

legislation will provide such a place, and I commend the distinguished Presiding Officer for his leadership on this issue.

The mission statement contained in that report sums up the purpose of this legislation:

This museum will give voice to the centrality of the African American experience and will make it possible for all people to understand the depth, complexity, and promise of the American experience.

It is that very goal, of completing the American story of our quest for freedom and truth by publicly incorporating the experience and contribution of African Americans, that is the essence of this legislation. This museum offers the promise and the hope that all Americans can come to understand the full story of how this Nation was formed. It is past time that we publicly acknowledge and incorporate the African Americans' experience into our collective identity and this museum will provide the appropriate means for accomplishing that very goal.

Again, I congratulate my colleague, Senator BROWNBACK, and I want to specifically highlight the tremendous contribution of Representative JOHN LEWIS of Georgia, who is the lead sponsor in the House of Representatives for this bill, on their perseverance in this matter. I am honored today to join them as their lead sponsor on this side of the aisle.

I see my colleague from Mississippi, who I know has some comments he wants to make on this as well. I thank him for his leadership. As the chairman of the Rules Committee, he will have a lot to say about how this bill moves through the committee and comes to the floor.

My congratulations to the Presiding Officer from Kansas and all others who have joined with us in this collective effort this morning.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from the great State of Mississippi.

Mr. LOTT. I yield myself 5 minutes of the time reserved for the Senator from Kansas, Mr. BROWNBACK.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleagues today in cosponsoring and supporting the introduction of legislation to create the National Museum of African American History and Culture. I particularly want to commend Senator BROWNBACK, the Presiding Officer this morning, for his leadership on this issue. This legislation could not be introduced today in a way that it can be considered and acted upon without his willingness to stay behind it, to work through some of the problems that did exist and to work with the Rules Committee and our staff to make sure we had legislation that could have broad-based support and could actually be passed by the Senate.

I am pleased to see my colleague from the Rules Committee, the ranking member, Senator DODD, as a cosponsor, as well as Senator FRIST, Senator STEVENS, Senator SANTORUM, Senator SMITH, and Senator DASCHLE. Obviously, leadership on both sides of the aisle has decided to join in sponsoring this truly historic legislation.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture will be built and operated within the Smithsonian Institution and be a full-fledged Smithsonian Museum. That is a critical point to be made. It gives additional stature, credibility, and supervision that will be very helpful in the years ahead as we try to make sure this museum exhibits the way it should and is fully utilized by the American people and supported by the Congress.

I rise to express my support for the legislation because this museum will showcase not only the history and the culture of African American experience, but it will serve as a vivid display of the countless contributions that African Americans have made to the United States and in fact to the world.

Back in 2001, I had an unusual experience. It was one of those rare weekends when I stayed in Washington and my family, including my wife, were all back home in Mississippi. So I took a bicycle ride down the Mall and I wound up at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I parked my bicycle across the way kind of in the edge of the bushes and just watched people. I do not know what really started me to doing that, but I guess I was struck, as I pulled up, at the number of people there and how they were relating to this memorial. They touched it. They shed tears there. They stood there. It was obviously a moving and spiritual experience, a connecting experience, maybe an experience of closure for some people. It struck me what an important monument and memorial that site is.

Later on that same week, I was meeting with a group of African American business leaders and we ended up talking about how to properly and adequately recognize the contributions of African Americans and their role in shaping American history. I conveyed to them the story of my experience at the Vietnam Memorial and how it seemed to positively affect the people that came there, and that it caused me to recognize that every American needs a monument, a memorial, that is sort of theirs that reflects their heritage. It could be of all kinds of backgrounds in America. We have talked about the need for the Native American monument somewhere in this city to honor what they have contributed to this country. So I believe the creation of this museum will go a long way toward a similar type healing process for African Americans, and I am honored to be a part of it.

The Smithsonian is no doubt one of the world's leaders in preserving, displaying, and telling the story of the American experience. Often called the

"Nation's Attic," the Smithsonian houses the great collections of the United States and educates the public on our rich history and the importance of ensuring that knowledge passes from one generation to the next.

However, our national attic currently has some voids and we should work to fill those voids in a very careful, thoughtful, and responsible way. Having this museum is one of those voids that needs to be addressed.

Last year, a Presidential commission was appointed to study the possibility of creating a museum dedicated to African American history and culture. The commission spent thousands of hours researching the possibilities of bringing this museum to light. The commission held dozens of forums and meetings across America and received feedback from a broad spectrum of citizens and leaders within the African American and other communities. These forums and discussions were thoughtful, calculated, and complete. The feedback was resoundingly clear—a national museum is the proper vehicle for showcasing and telling the world about the African American experience. I could not agree more.

I am delighted to join in sponsoring this legislation. The history and culture of African-American life in this country is a very important part of the history of our culture and all that is America. Its story needs to be included in the sacred places in this city.

I commend Senator BROWNBACK for his leadership. I am glad to join in a bipartisan effort to get this legislation approved.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). The minority leader.

Mr. DASCHLE. Madam President, I add my voice to those of Senator LOTT and Senator DODD and others in expressing my support and commendation to the Presiding Officer for his leadership, as well as to Senator DODD and Senator LOTT, Senator SANTORUM, Senator STEVENS, and others who have taken the initiative to show such leadership on this very important project.

If I could think of one word as I consider the prospect of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, it would be "overdue." It is overdue. It is long past due. I hope on a bipartisan basis we continue to demonstrate our recognition of the remarkable contributions of African American culture and African American leadership to our country. One cannot understand the story of America without understanding the story of African Americans.

I hope we continue to work to move this project along. Again, I commend those directly involved.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mr. DASCHLE. Madam President, let me talk briefly about the important legislation addressed by the distinguished majority leader. He had spoken