

"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.

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#### 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.

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#### 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