

United States to the Federal building and United States courthouse referred to in section 1 shall be deemed to be a reference to the Tony Hall Federal Building and United States Courthouse.

By Mr. MENENDEZ:

S. 2270. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a refundable credit against income tax to subsidize the cost of COBRA continuation coverage for certain individuals; to the Committee on Finance.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, today I am pleased to introduce the Health Care COBRA OffSet Tax Savings (COSTS) Act of 2006. This important legislation is a step forward in helping working families afford quality health care in this country.

Rewarding work is one of the most fundamental core values of our Nation. Our founding fathers built a society on the notion that if you work hard, you will have an opportunity to provide a better future for your children and thus build a stronger, more competitive nation. And, as we've seen throughout our Nation's history, America's workers have not disappointed.

Unfortunately, too many Americans are working hard every day, but are still unable to make ends meet and provide even the most basic needs for their family, such as food, shelter, or health care. The legislation I'm introducing will help address one of these important challenges: affordable, quality health care for working families.

The statistics are undeniable—almost 46 million Americans have no health insurance and more than 1 million of the uninsured are in my home state of New Jersey. But that's just the beginning of the problem. Even families who are fortunate enough to have health insurance, are struggling to pay the premiums, which in New Jersey, have increased at four times the rate of earnings. Since 2000, the employee share of health care premiums in New Jersey increased almost 43 percent or almost \$400 a year. When family earnings increase by only 10 percent over the same period, it becomes clear just how challenging it is for our hard working families to get by.

The Health Care COSTS Act does not address the entire problem, but it will help some workers afford to keep their health insurance when they're between jobs. Currently, many workers who receive health coverage through their employer are entitled to keep that coverage for up to 18 months after they leave their jobs. This coverage is known as COBRA coverage. However, many don't take advantage of COBRA coverage because it's simply too expensive. The employee, who has just lost their job, has to pay the full cost of the coverage, making it prohibitively expensive for most families.

The Health Care COSTS Act helps moderate-income families with the cost of COBRA by providing an "advanceable" tax credit for half the cost of these health care premiums.

The tax credit would go directly to the health plan administrator, thus reducing the workers' monthly premiums by half. This is not a handout, but a helping hand for workers who have contributed to the economic well-being of their community and have earned the opportunity to care for their family while they get back on their feet and find another job.

Clearly, there is much more to do in addressing the health care crisis in this country, but this is an important first step in helping working families afford health care coverage during one of the most difficult and vulnerable times a family might face. I hope this legislation will be a starting point for discussion of the significant challenges families face in affording quality health care in this country.

#### AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 2745. Mrs. CLINTON (for herself, Mr. KERRY, Mr. LAUTENBERG, and Mr. MENENDEZ) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 852, to create a fair and efficient system to resolve claims of victims for bodily injury caused by asbestos exposure, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2746. Mr. FRIST (for Mr. SPECTER (for himself and Mr. LEAHY)) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 852, supra.

SA 2747. Mr. SPECTER proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2746 proposed by Mr. FRIST (for Mr. SPECTER (for himself and Mr. LEAHY)) to the bill S. 852, supra.

SA 2748. Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Mr. COBURN, Mr. GRAHAM, Mr. ENSIGN, Mr. CRAPO, Mr. INHOFE, Mr. MARTINEZ, Mr. DEMINT, Mr. THUNE, Mr. BENNETT, Mr. SMITH, Mr. CRAIG, Mr. BUNNING, Mr. THOMAS, Mr. SUNUNU, Mr. CHAMBLISS, Mr. ENZI, and Mr. HAGEL) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 852, supra.

SA 2749. Mr. CORNYN proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2748 proposed by Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Mr. COBURN, Mr. GRAHAM, Mr. ENSIGN, Mr. CRAPO, Mr. INHOFE, Mr. MARTINEZ, Mr. DEMINT, Mr. THUNE, Mr. BENNETT, Mr. SMITH, Mr. CRAIG, Mr. BUNNING, Mr. THOMAS, Mr. SUNUNU, Mr. CHAMBLISS, Mr. ENZI, and Mr. HAGEL) to the bill S. 852, supra.

SA 2750. Mr. FRIST (for Ms. COLLINS (for herself and Mr. BOND)) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 662, to reform the postal laws of the United States.

SA 2751. Mr. FRIST (for Mr. HARKIN) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 662, supra.

SA 2752. Mr. FRIST (for Mr. REID) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 662, supra.

SA 2753. Mr. FRIST (for Mr. STEVENS) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 662, supra.

SA 2754. Mr. KYL (for himself and Mr. CHAMBLISS) proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2746 proposed by Mr. FRIST (for Mr. SPECTER (for himself and Mr. LEAHY)) to the bill S. 852, to create a fair and efficient system to resolve claims of victims for bodily injury caused by asbestos exposure, and for other purposes.

SA 2755. Mr. SESSIONS submitted an amendment intended to be proposed to amendment SA 2746 proposed by Mr. FRIST (for Mr. SPECTER (for himself and Mr. LEAHY)) to the bill S. 852, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2756. Mr. SESSIONS submitted an amendment intended to be proposed to amendment SA 2746 proposed by Mr. FRIST

(for Mr. SPECTER (for himself and Mr. LEAHY)) to the bill S. 852, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2757. Mr. SESSIONS submitted an amendment intended to be proposed to amendment SA 2746 proposed by Mr. FRIST (for Mr. SPECTER (for himself and Mr. LEAHY)) to the bill S. 852, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2758. Mr. SESSIONS submitted an amendment intended to be proposed to amendment SA 2746 proposed by Mr. FRIST (for Mr. SPECTER (for himself and Mr. LEAHY)) to the bill S. 852, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

#### TEXT OF AMENDMENTS

SA 2745. Mrs. CLINTON (for herself, Mr. KERRY, Mr. LAUTENBERG, and Mr. MENENDEZ) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 852, to create a fair and efficient system to resolve claims of victims for bodily injury caused by asbestos exposure, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 15, line 23, insert " , or the captive insurance company established and funded under title III of division K of the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, 2003 (Public Law 108-7; 117 Stat. 517)" before the period.

On page 125, between lines 22 and 23, insert the following:

(1) ASBESTOS EXPOSURE AS THE RESULT OF A NATURAL OR OTHER DISASTER.—A claimant may file an exceptional medical claim with the Fund if—

(A) such claimant has been exposed to asbestos from any area that is subject to a declaration by the President of a major disaster, as defined under section 102 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122), as the result of—

(i) a natural or other disaster, occurring before, on, or after the date of enactment of this Act, including—

(I) the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, New York on September 11, 2001; and

(II) Hurricane Katrina of 2005 in the Gulf Region of the United States; or

(ii) the clean up and remediation following such a disaster; or

(B) such claimant has been exposed to asbestos as a result of living with a person who has met the exposure requirements described in subparagraph (A).

On page 365, line 12, insert "(1) IN GENERAL.—" before "Except".

On page 365, between lines 17 and 18, insert the following:

(2) ACTIONS PRESERVED.—Nothing in this Act shall be construed to limit or abrogate any pending or future civil action against the United States Government or any State or local government, or any agency or subdivision thereof, or any former or present officer or employee thereof, in either their official or individual capacities, seeking redress for exposure to asbestos—

(A) from any area that is subject to a declaration by the President of a major disaster, as defined under section 102 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122), as the result of—

(i) a natural or other disaster, occurring before, on, or after the date of enactment of this Act, including—

(I) the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, New York on September 11, 2001; and

(II) Hurricane Katrina of 2005 in the Gulf Region of the United States; or