

coming in \$189 billion less than bureaucrats projected they would cost when the bill was written. Of course, States are involved in this as well because they had a lot of senior citizens on what we call Medicaid for low-income people. States are saving money in lower contributions. These are referred to as clawback payments. So State payments are now projected to be \$37 billion less over a 10-year period, and that is 27 percent lower than what we thought they would be when the legislation was written.

Just in the year 2006, the 50 States saved \$700 million. The plans are negotiating lower prices for drugs. Let's take the top 25 drugs used by seniors. Using them, the Medicare prescription drug plans have been able to negotiate prices that are, on average, 35 percent lower than the average cash price at the retail pharmacies. That is 35 percent lower. Some examples: Lipitor is 15 percent lower; Anetol, 63 percent lower; Norvas, 28 percent lower; Fosamax, 30 percent lower.

When the drug benefit was signed into law, we believed it would work. We believed it would hold down costs. That is certainly happening today, now going into the second year of experience with this legislation. At the time it was signed into law, we also said that if it did not work, if the negotiating model we wrote into the legislation did not hold costs down, then Congress would need to reexamine the whole setup. That makes sense. But if costs grew too fast, then the whole idea, obviously, would have to be revisited. Maybe we would have to restrict access to drugs. Maybe we would have to rely more on mail-order pharmacies, instead of liberal access to local retail pharmacies. Maybe more drastic cost-cutting measures would be needed. We thought of all those things as we were writing this legislation.

But as it turns out now, 3 years later, since the President signed the bill, that is not the case. Everyone has heard the old saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That certainly applies here, and the evidence shows it. I would be the first one to say the Medicare drug benefit is not perfect. There are improvements that can be made. The Senate version of the drug bill had some important features that I hope we can revisit at some point. Congress should look at ways to make it easier for low-income beneficiaries to get the additional assistance they need by eliminating the low-income subsidy asset tax. We need to look at payments to pharmacies and make some reforms in that area. We need to look at ways to simplify the enrollment process. And there are other areas, too, where we can make improvements.

But to emphasize one area that is working very well, it is the negotiating power of the Medicare drug plans. They have shown their ability to hold down costs, so it is working. The pleas from the drug plans' opponents to put the Government—because they believe in

big Government—in charge of negotiating are, quite frankly, about politics, not policy. These voices want to score political points with the drug benefit. It saddens me that we are going to start off this year with a new Democratic-controlled Congress playing politics with Medicare and raising issues that could harm our senior citizens as opposed to benefiting them.

But that is what this issue is all about; it is about politics. It is not about saving money because this program, through negotiations by the drug plans, is already saving money. It is surely not about improving the program. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office looked at the proposals made last year to have the Secretary negotiating drug prices, and they concluded they would not achieve any savings. So around here the Congressional Budget Office is like God. If they say something costs something and you don't have an offset for it, they are so much of a god around here, if you try to get it done, you have to have 60 votes to get it done. Now we have the Congressional Budget Office saying there are no savings, because the Government negotiates instead of having the plans negotiate. During the debate on the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Senators SNOWE, WYDEN, MCCAIN, and STABENOW offered an amendment to give the Secretary authority to negotiate with drug companies.

Here is what CBO said about that amendment: It would produce zero savings. So what is this amendment all about? If you are going to save senior citizens some money by having Government negotiate instead of the plans, you should not get a big zero out of the CBO.

I want to have a second chart observed by my colleagues. This is a person a lot of people 3 years ago were expressing was competent when he was judging that this bill would cost more than the CBO said it would cost, and that somehow the administration was playing games with these figures. All these figures ended up being too high because they are \$189 billion lower than they were saying they were going to be. There are no cost overruns in this program as in every other program. I am going to refer to the chief actuary for Medicare who examined these proposals we are talking about and having the Government negotiate. He came up with the same conclusion: Direct price negotiations by the Health and Human Services Secretary would be unlikely to achieve prescription drug discounts of greater magnitude than those negotiated by the Medicare prescription drug plans responding to competitive forces.

Competition in the marketplace is what getting the consumer the best buy for the money is all about. Every day consumers benefit from competition. We wrote competition into this program 3 years ago, and that competition is working for the seniors. Now we have people who want to come out here

and screw it all up for the senior citizens of America.

I hope we can put politics aside here and focus on some of the real improvements we could be making in the drug benefit program that I pointed out today that need to be made, and not deal with things that are working. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Madam President, since no other Members are here, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO LINDA HAWKER

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to a great friend of mine, an amazing woman in Springfield, IL, a dedicated public servant, Linda Hawker.

After nearly 30 years in public life, Linda is retiring as Secretary of the Illinois State Senate and starting a new chapter in her life. Those who worked with Linda in the Illinois State capitol can tell you what an amazing difference she made in the office of the Secretary of the Senate. The job is a tough one. The hours are long. But Linda has worked tirelessly to serve the people of the Senate and the people of my State.

Linda is going to be missed. Linda and I started together working in the Illinois State Senate. I was fresh out of law school. She had just started as a secretary to one of the State senators back in the early 1970s. She was born and raised in Springfield. Linda is one of eight children. She worked hard throughout her life to raise her daughter. She graduated from Sangamon State University, now known as the University of Illinois-Springfield, with a degree in political studies.

Linda has worked so hard not only for the Senate but for many candidates for the Illinois State Senate over the years. She was the first woman to serve as Secretary of the Illinois Senate, the guardian of the public records of that institution. Before serving in that position, she was assistant secretary. Prior to that, she worked for the Senate Democratic leadership staff and served as special assistant to former Illinois Senate president Phil Rock.

As Secretary of the Senate, Linda is best known as the chief administrative and fiscal officer of the Senate. But those terms don't tell the whole story. She brought a state-of-the-art computer system into the Illinois State Senate to make it easier to track bills and debate them. She was also instrumental in the creation and development of the Illinois Women in Government Organization. In 2004, she was

honored by the Illinois Democratic Women with the Eleanor Roosevelt Outstanding Democratic Woman of the Year Award—an award presented to only one woman each year—for her work in grassroots politics. Linda is also a founder of the Illinois Women in Leadership Organization, which provides opportunities and training for women to become more politically involved in my State.

Linda is deeply involved in her community, having worked in a lot of organizations, including the Committee to Study the Honesty and Integrity of Springfield Elections, the University of Illinois at Springfield Alumni Council, the Springfield Urban League, and is a former member of the Executive Committee for the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries.

But if you ask those who know Linda well, they will tell you that her story should not just be told in terms of what she has done but the people's lives she has affected. She is known as the go-to person in my part of the world, especially if you want to run for office. She is known not just as a fabulous adviser and mentor; she is the hardest working person I have known in the political scene. She is not afraid to roll up her sleeves and get into the thick of it. Linda managed the campaign of Senator Penny Severns, whose life was taken away too soon by breast cancer. They were quite a team. Penny Severns won a district she was never supposed to win, and Linda was right by her side. She has always been a great person to talk to. She always had time to listen. To be Linda Hawker's friend is to know loyalty, honesty, a diligent worker, and the best kind of friendship.

Her leadership as both Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Illinois Senate has been an example of quiet integrity to all of those, including myself, who have worked with her. She will start a new chapter in her life with retirement, but I know no matter what she does she will be successful.

Last night, they had a reception for Linda in Springfield and I was told by press accounts this morning it was one of the largest bipartisan turnouts in history, which she truly deserved. She was that kind of a person and still is and will be for many years to come. We hope she has many great adventures in the future.

Linda, congratulations for your hard work, and thanks for being my friend.

THE IRAQ RESOLUTION ON MILITARY FORCE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it was just a few years ago—some days seem much longer—that we considered a resolution in the Senate to authorize the use of military force in Iraq. We cast thousands of votes. Most members of Congress cannot recall too many of them specifically, unless reminded. But you never forget a vote on a war because you know that, at the end of the

day, if you decide to go forward, people will die. It is your fervent hope that it will be the enemy, of course, but you know, in honesty, that it will be American soldiers and innocent people as well. So a vote on a war is one that Members of Congress—most every one of them—take so seriously. It costs you sleep, as you think about the right thing to do.

I can recall when the vote was cast on this war in Iraq. I sat on the Intelligence Committee for months listening to the testimony and all the evidence that was brought before us, listening behind closed doors to this classified information about the situation in that country, and then emerging from that Intelligence Committee and reading newspapers and watching television, saying the American people are not being told the same thing outside that room that I am being told inside that room. There were serious differences of opinion in this administration about whether there were even weapons of mass destruction.

At one point, we challenged the administration and said: If there are weapons of mass destruction, for goodness' sake, turn over some locations to the international inspectors. Let them find them. Once they discover them, it will confirm our fear, and other countries will join us in this effort against Saddam Hussein. But, no, they wouldn't do it. Although they told us there were hundreds of possible locations, they wouldn't turn over any specific location possibility to the international inspectors.

It raised a question in my mind as to whether they were very certain of any locations. And, if you remember, weapons of mass destruction were the centerpiece of the argument for the invasion of Iraq.

On Christmas Day many years later after that decision was made on the floor of this Senate, we learned that more Americans have now died in Iraq than died on September 11. Less than a week after that disclosure, on New Year's Eve, we marked a mournful milestone in the war in Iraq: the death of the 3,000th U.S. serviceman killed in Iraq.

Today, as I stand before the Senate, the Department of Defense reports that we have lost 3,014 American soldiers in Iraq. The 3,000th death is as tragic as the 1st death, the 300th death, the 1,000th death, but the staggering scope of casualties, the enormous toll this war has taken, must not be allowed to pass unnoticed.

America's service men and women are the bravest and best in the world. I know I say that with some patriotic pride, having been there to sit and have breakfast and lunch with them in Iraq, Afghanistan, and their other assignments. I just can't say enough about their courage and sacrifice, just ordinary, young-looking men and women who do extraordinary things.

This last October, with Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island, while sitting for

breakfast with a group of about 12 soldiers from Illinois, I went around the table: Where are you from? Downstate. Oh, you are from the suburbs of Chicago. Or, you live in the city. We talked about everything under the Sun. We talked about the Chicago Bears, the Cubs, the White Sox, and how things were going back home.

I asked them how things were going. They said: We had to get up early. We had to form an honor guard at dawn because one of our soldiers was killed in the middle of the night by one of these homemade bombs that takes so many lives.

I asked: How often does that happen?

Well, pretty frequently.

We know it does because we read the press accounts. We think of these young men and women and the challenges they face every single day as they risk their lives for America. We think about the families back home deep in prayer that their soldier is going to return home safely.

We owe them so much. We owe them our prayers and thanks for sure. But those of us in elected office owe them more than that. Part of what we owe them is a plan to bring this war to a close, a plan to bring them home safely, a plan to congratulate them as they return home for what they have given to this country.

Last March, President Bush was asked whether there would come a day when there will be no U.S. forces in Iraq. His answer to that simple question spoke volumes. The President said: That, of course, is an objective, and that will be decided by future Presidents and future Governments of Iraq.

Now we are told that in a few days the President will make a major policy announcement about this war. According to reports he is going to call for an increase, a major escalation of the U.S. troops committed in Iraq. The administration carefully has used the word "surge" to suggest this is somehow temporary, but we have to listen carefully when the President makes his announcement to see just how temporary it might be for the 10,000 or 20,000 or more American lives that will be at risk because of this decision.

Sending tens of thousands more troops to Iraq is not a change of course. It is not what our top military experts advise. In fact, they have said just the opposite. It is clearly not what the American people bargained for when they voted just a few months ago for a change in our direction in Iraq. It is literally and tragically more of the same. I think our troops deserve better.

President Bush has always said he will send more troops if the commanders in the field said they needed more. In December, General Abizaid, the head of the U.S. Central Command, testified before the Armed Services Committee. This is what the general said. The President told us he was listening to the generals: