

State costs, because the States do not have to pick up the duel eligibles as they used to.

There is something good coming out of the discussion the Senator and I are having. If we would have had this discussion 3 years ago, you would have said what we were doing was going to bring holy hell and not do any good and it would never work. At least now there is some acceptance of the program. So maybe with a little bit more dialog we will come around to the point where you are saying: Maybe, Senator GRASSLEY, you were right.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am always—in fact, I have been quoted in your campaign literature sometimes saying nice things about you.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I noticed you have not said that so I can quote you again.

Mr. DURBIN. I am being very careful this time around. And I would be happy to acknowledge you are my friend and a great leader, and you have done a great job here. And put it in your next brochure if it will help.

But I want to close by saying thank you for this dialog. It is rare on the floor of the Senate, and we need more of it. I would say, when it comes to perfect laws, I think aside from the Ten Commandments, most laws could stand an amendment or two. So I hope you will be open to the possibility of improving Medicare Prescription Part D.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Remember, the bill you want to amend is a bipartisan bill. Remember that.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Senator.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I thank you.

Mr. President, I want to finish my remarks. I am not sure finishing my remarks can be more valuable than what we just had here in this sort of discussion. But I think when the Senator came in, I was kind of needling the other party a little bit with a statement like all of this business of Democrats introducing this noninterference language, and my copying it, thinking that was the right thing to do, was the bipartisan thing to do, that now they are backing off of it, as you can see by the recent exchange I had with my friend from Illinois, that it is sort of for the Democrats like: We supported it before we opposed it.

But I want to recap. When Democrats controlled the Senate, their bills took the same approach and had basically the same noninterference language—the same prohibition on government negotiations. Looks like my colleagues across the aisle yielded—and perhaps against their own better policy judgment—to take the opportunity to make political hay by demagoguing what seems like a reasonable proposition. That proposition was that Government, with all those Medicare beneficiaries in the Medicare program, should negotiate lower prices for drugs. In reality, it is nothing but an appealing sound bite.

After the Medicare law was enacted, opponents distorted the meaning of the language and vowed to change it. They

have now demagogued on this issue for 3 years. They had all that time to prepare their proposals. What has been introduced to date? The bill introduced in the House to address the so-called prohibition has been described as “not as far-reaching as the new majority indicated before taking power.”

The Senate bill is a nonbinding sense of the Congress resolution as a placeholder with no details. I understand that some bills are introduced as markers pending further development. I have done that myself. But 3 years of talking about this issue, talking about what is wrong with the noninterference clause, and there still is no more substance behind the proposal than that?

One of the questions I should have asked the Senator from Illinois is, please describe to me how it is going to work if you take out the noninterference clause. I have never had anybody tell me that. Something like, let's do it a little bit like the VA, but the HHS is not the VA. So how is it going to be done? Somewhere along the line they are going to have to tell us.

In fact, the USA Today editorial page recognized the lack of substance when they wrote in November that House Democratic aides couldn't provide any details on their party's proposal. This is after 3 years of their finding fault with what is law.

It makes me wonder if people who led the charge against the so-called prohibition on Government negotiation truly ever did change their minds about this provision. There was actually a surprising level of agreement among Democrats and Republicans that the private sector would be able to do a better job of tough negotiation with drug companies than the Government could ever do. We had all seen the same history of the poor job Medicare does setting prices on almost anything, whether it is hospitals or whether it is wheelchairs. Everyone from President Clinton to Mr. Gephardt to Speaker PELOSI to the senior Senator from Oregon, recognized that at the time when they put their names on legislation.

The same USA Today editorial referred to opponents' plans to change the law as “more of a campaign pander than a fully baked plan.” Maybe the opponents finally realized that themselves.

I believe beneficiaries and the public deserve more than that. That is what the debate is going to be all about. But they are going to have to sell their point.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for a period of up to 10 minutes each.

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

ANTONIO POMERLEAU, AN AMAZING VERMONT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, one of the most amazing citizens of our remarkable State of Vermont is Antonio Pomerleau. Most people know him as Tony Pomerleau. My wife Marcelle and our children know him simply as Uncle Tony.

Tony and his wife Rita have been among the most generous contributors to the well-being of families in Vermont of anyone I know, and he did not come from a wealthy background. His parents, my wife's grandparents, came as immigrants to the United States from the Province of Quebec in Canada. Nonetheless, he and his wife Rita raised a family of 10 and also faced the tragedy of losing two beautiful daughters. Throughout it all, he has retained his position as a leading citizen of our State but even more so as an example to all of us.

Shortly before Christmas, Tony was named Vermonter of the year by our State's largest newspaper. With pride, I ask unanimous consent that the editorial about our Uncle Tony be printed in the RECORD so everyone throughout our great country can know about him.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press, Dec. 24, 2006]

TONY POMERLEAU, VERMONT OF THE YEAR

He's 89 years old and still going like the Energizer bunny, his family says.

Tony Pomerleau.

People know his name in this state. And those who know the man consider themselves fortunate.

He is Santa Claus to countless children, the festive, white-haired gentleman who has thrown a big party every Christmas since 1982 for hundreds of children and their families who might not be able to afford a celebration of their own.

He is Mr. P, the delightful, generous soul who added a holiday party for families of the Vermont Army National Guard in 2004. It was a huge lift for the 800 or so people who attended, and he did it again in 2005—and again this year, opening the doors to all Guard families, with special attention paid to the families of about 120 Guard members who are still deployed.

Everyone is welcome. Everyone has a seat at Antonio (Tony) Pomerleau's table.

It's Pomerleau's giving spirit that makes him so deserving of the honor of Vermonter of the Year. His steadfast commitment to Vermont and the people of this state make him a fine choice.

As Robert Perreault of Hardwick said in his nomination letter, “He is extremely generous with his time, ideas and money, to implement programs that have helped people, especially the children and our Vermont Guardsmen and their families.”

Pomerleau's niece, Marcelle Leahy, wife of Sen. Patrick Leahy, encouraged her uncle to play a role in helping the Guard families with whom she was working through the Guard's Family Readiness Group. Pomerleau was more than happy to do it.

It doesn't take much for Pomerleau to be persuaded to share his good fortune with others. He "came up the hard way," his son Ernie said last week. Tony Pomerleau has been there.

He was the third child of Ernest and Alma Pomerleau, a hardworking French-Canadian couple who decided to try their chances across the border in Vermont. When Pomerleau was 6 months old, the family moved to a dairy farm in Barton, according to an unpublished biography the family has put together.

As a child, Pomerleau was touched by two formative incidents. First, he fell down the basement stairs at age 3 and was forced to wear an iron corset. Doctors feared his life would be shortened.

"He wasn't supposed to live beyond 12 years old," Erie Pomerleau said. "And here he is, 89 and still going strong."

The second incident, according to the family biography, was something of a miracle. Alma Pomerleau took her son, age 10, to Ste. Anne de Beaupre in Quebec—the shrine that is covered in crutches and other medical aids left behind by countless others who believed they were cured.

Alma removed young Tony's iron brace, and they returned home to Vermont without it. Her son was fine.

"Of course it was a miracle. It was my mother's prayers," Pomerleau said in the biography.

And so Tony Pomerleau gives back. He gives and gives, according to the families, charities, schools and organizations that have been touched by his spirit.

There's the renowned annual party, organized by the Burlington Parks and Recreation Department, and paid for by Pomerleau. Now there's also the Guard party. There is St. Michael's College in Colchester, where Pomerleau, received an honorary doctorate after years of contributing to the campus. There is Burlington's Church Street, which he helped rejuvenate in the 1950s. There is the Burlington Police Department, where Pomerleau was a longtime police commissioner. He bought the North Avenue building for the police headquarters and has provided ongoing support for the officers, such as laptop computers for their patrol cars. There are the scholarships at Rice Memorial High School, the renovations at Christ the King Church, the trips Pomerleau has funded for Burlington schoolchildren, and the regular donations to the American Red Cross, United Way of Chittenden County and the Salvation Army.

Pomerleau started his entrepreneurial life as a child, soon after he shed that iron brace. He sold haircuts and canaries. He washed cars, ran errands and helped his family in their general store in Newport. In 1942, after working for a national shoe store chain up and down the East Coast, he decided to settle in Burlington where he bought a failing grocery store. Within three years, he owned four stores and a wholesale beverage business. In 1951, he started his real estate career and by age 45, he was a millionaire. Pomerleau built Vermont's first shopping center in the 1950s, the Ethan Allen Shopping Plaza, and then developed about 20 more.

He has lived large, and the beautiful Greek Revival building on College Street that houses Pomerleau Real Estate is a testament to that life.

Through it all, Pomerleau's wife, Rita, and 10 children, two of whom have died, have been his main focus. Pomerleau is also the proud grandfather of 13.

In many ways, Tony Pomerleau remains the optimistic boy who left his iron brace behind at Ste. Anne de Beaupre.

"Someone asked him the other day when he was going to retire," son Ernie said. "And he said, 'When I get old.'"

Never get old, Mr. P. We like you the way you are.

HONORING PRESIDENT GERALD FORD

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, even as we usher in a new Congress, Americans have said farewell to one of our Chief Executives, President Gerald R. Ford. President Ford was a man of character and integrity, a leader of hope and purpose. I hope and pray that the outpouring of support for President Ford in recent days will be a source of comfort and strength for his family and especially for his beloved wife, First Lady Betty Ford.

The people of Michigan's Fifth District loved their Congressman Jerry Ford. They sent him to the House of Representatives 13 times, by large margins. In fact, Congressman Ford's reelection percentages over nearly a quarter century did not vary by more than a few points. His constituents supported him as he served them, consistently and solidly.

It is easy to see why his constituents felt such a connection with him. Jerry Ford grew up in Grand Rapids, MI. He achieved the rank of Eagle Scout and, in high school, joined the honor society and was named to all-city and all-State football teams. At the University of Michigan, he played center on two national championship football teams and was named most valuable player in 1934.

Early in life, Jerry Ford's values and basic good sense helped him see past the excitement of the moment. He passed up opportunities to use his athletic prowess for the Detroit Lions and Green Bay Packers and instead decided to coach boxing and football at Yale University, where he realized his goal of attending law school. He returned to Grand Rapids to begin practicing law and, after serving in the Navy during World War II, returned again to practice law and seek election to Congress in 1948. Somehow in all that activity, he found time to court Elizabeth Bloomer. She must have been a very understanding woman because he even campaigned on their wedding day. President Ford would later say that his most valued advice was that which came from his wife. They spent 58 years together and had four wonderful children.

The qualities that endeared Congressman Ford to his constituents also inspired trust in his colleagues in the House, who elected him Republican Conference chairman in 1963 and then Republican leader in 1965. In fact, Congressman Ford was so well regarded that President Lyndon Johnson named him to the Warren Commission which investigated the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and President

Richard Nixon tapped him to replace the resigned Vice President Spiro Agnew.

Gerald Ford loved the House of Representatives, and his personal political goal was to become Speaker of the House. He declined invitations to run for the Senate and for Governor. Ironically, while the Republicans' minority status kept him from leading that Chamber, his appointment as Vice President allowed him to become President of the Senate.

The Ford Presidency was brief, just 29 months long, but broke significant new political ground. He was the only occupant of the Oval Office who was never elected either President or Vice President. Former New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller's appointment as Vice President meant that, for the first time in American history, neither of the Nation's two top officers had been elected to either office. The Ford and Rockefeller appointments were the first handled under the procedures established by the 25th amendment to the Constitution, ratified less than a decade earlier. And, of course, President Ford presided over our Nation's bicentennial in 1976.

The passage of even a few years, let alone a few decades, can easily change memories and perspectives. In recent years, the majority party has held either House of Congress by a modest margin. In this body today, the balance of power could rest on one Senator. At one point during Gerald Ford's service in the House, however, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by more than 2-to-1. Even under those difficult circumstances, Congressman Ford found ways of reaching across the aisle, working productively with the other party to find solutions to the Nation's problems.

When Gerald Ford took up residence at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, there were times when he had to stand up to Congress. He issued an astounding 66 vetoes in fewer than 3 years, and Congress was able to override just a few.

President Ford served during one of the most trying times in American history, facing troubles at home and abroad. At home, there was the Watergate scandal that had resulted in the Ford Presidency. In 1975, unemployment reached a level nearly twice what it is today. Inflation was in double digits. Fears of energy shortages persisted. Elsewhere in the world, President Ford faced the war in Vietnam and crises in the Middle East and the continued threat posed by the former Soviet Union. And on top of all of that, he shouldered the burden of restoring Americans' faith in their leaders and in democracy itself. Last week in his eulogy, Dr. Henry Kissinger, President Ford's Secretary of State, put it this way: "Unassuming and without guile, Gerald Ford undertook to restore the confidence of Americans in their political institutions and purposes."

He made decisions, some of which were unpopular at the time, that he