

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.”