The Senator from Oregon is recognized.

HEALTHY AMERICANS ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, our friend and colleague, Senator BENNETT, and I have joined together in the first bipartisan legislation to guarantee quality, affordable health care for all Americans in more than a decade. I could have no better partner to deal with the very issue at hand than Senator BENNETT, who, of course, is a senior Member of the Senate Republican leadership and widely respected on both sides of the aisle. In the days ahead, together, we are going to be talking with Senators of both parties and discussing this legislation on the floor with one specific goal in mind; that is, Senate action to fix health care in America in 2007.

Now, of course, the popular wisdom is that in this situation, you can never, ever be done. All the Washington, DC, beltway pundits say fixing health care is something we can’t do right now and that it will be the job for the next President and the next Congress and everybody ought to expect that in advance. This is why wesupport bipartisan legislation for the years ahead, together, we are going to do everything we can to make sure they get it.

Yesterday, the CEOs of five major companies joined our push for action on health care this year. They are saying they cannot afford for the Congress to wait on fixing health care. It is the top issue here at home. It has been studied, studied, and studied. It has been poke and prodded for an awfully long time. It is time for the Senate to act and act now.

Our citizens are staying up late worrying about how they are going to be able to afford quality health care. I don’t see how Members of Congress can explain the night issues at night about addressing our citizens’ concerns, and say we will talk about this again in a couple of years. The country wants action, and Senator BENNETT and I are going to do everything we can to make sure they get it.

The Healthy Americans Act is based on a handful of key principles. The first is that if you are going to fix health care, you have to cover everybody. If you don’t cover everybody, what happens in American health care is that those who are uninsured shift their costs to those who are insured. So Senator BENNETT would get a lower Part B premium and actually see, on a voluntary basis, why good health pays off in terms of the premium costs seniors face.

Second, we believe we ought to build universal coverage around private choices, while protecting current Government programs. Our legislation, for example, keeps in place the basic structure of Medicare and veterans programs, making improvements in Medicare; for example, creating incentives for prevention, particularly under Part B, what is called the outpatient portion of the program. We build the future of American health care around quality, affordable private choices, while protecting current Government programs.

The third area we address is fixing the Tax Code. We have 180 million people essentially getting health care in America by a historical accident. Back in the 1940s, there were wage and price controls. It wasn’t possible to get quality affordable health care to our citizens from payors from providers. From payors to providers in the spring of 2009, Congress will get around to dealing with the principal domestic issue of our time.

I and Senator BENNETT don’t believe we were given election certificates to sit for 2 more years when the American people are saying they cannot afford for the Congress to wait on fixing health care. It is the top issue here at home. It has been studied, studied, and studied. It has been poke and prodded for an awfully long time. It is time for the Senate to act and act now.

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Finally, our judgment is we are spending enough on health care today—on health care. We are not spending it in the right places. To put it into perspective, this year we are going to spend $2.3 trillion on health care. There are about 300 million of us. If you divide 300 million into $2.3 trillion, you could go out and hire a personal physician for every seven families in America and pay that doctor $200,000 a year, and then we would all have quality, affordable health care. Picture that in the State of Montana or in another part of our country: Senator the amount of money we are spending today, could have their own personal physician who would get paid $200,000, and their job would be to take care of seven families. Whenever I bring that number up to the physicians, they say: Ron, where do I go to get my seven families? It sounds pretty good. It would be pretty good to have a personal physician again today rather than being a bean counter and an administrator and somebody who has to shuffle through all the paper and bureaucracy.

We are spending enough; we are not spending it in the right places. So that is why we have to say the first thing we are going to do is spend what is being allocated by American health care today more wisely.

The Lewin Group is sort of the gold standard of doing health care analyses. They analyzed the Healthy Americans Act and the President’s proposals and proposals from various States, and they have found that under the legislation that Senator BENNETT and I are working on in the Senate, it would be possible to save $1.45 trillion—that is with a T—on health care spending in the years ahead, the first proposal to actually lower the rate of growth in health spending. So the facts are indisputable. People who are uninsured are up against global competition—and not competing with somebody in Denver or Texas but in global markets—it makes no sense to dump all this onto the back of the employer. Senator BENNETT and I would cut the link between health insurance and employment.

We have put a special emphasis on creating a new culture of wellness and, in a sense, dealing with the fact that America doesn’t have health care at all. What we have is “sick” care. Medicare will spend thousands of dollars under Part A for senior citizens’ hospital bills and virtually nothing under Part B for prevention to keep people well. So we make those voluntary incentives part of Medicare so that if a senior, for example, in Montana were to lower her blood pressure or her cholesterol for the first time, that senior would get a lower Part B premium and actually see, on a voluntary basis, why good health pays off in terms of the premium costs seniors face.

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example, consumes most of the Medi-
care dollars, essentially as a result of
problems relating to heart disease and
diabetes and a host of other illnesses
that could be prevented. Of course, it is
well understood by every Senator that
there is a demographic avalanche com-
ing with older people.

So with the facts not in dispute, with
the country saying act now, don’t put
this off for another 2 years, the Senate
has an opportunity to work in a bipar-
tisan way.

Senators on my side of the aisle have
made it clear—correctly in my view—
that we have to get everybody covered.
It is not right for this country to be
the only western industrialized nation
that cannot figure out how to get ev-
erybody under the tent. It is important
to get everybody covered.

Senator BENNETT and others on the
Republican side of the aisle have been
correct in saying the public doesn’t feel
comfortable with the idea of having
Government run it all. The people in
my State voted against what is known
as a “single payer plan” in 2002 by a 3-
to-1 majority.

What Senator BENNETT and I have
put together, for the amount of money
that we are thinking about, is a bill that
will save close to $1.5 trillion over the
next 10 years. It is legislation you can
explain at any townhall meeting in
Montana, Oregon, or anywhere else,
and that is that every citizen would
have access to a private health policy
at least as good as their Member of
Congress has. It is very simple to un-
derstand.

I have a Blue Cross card in my pock-
et. I was able, during the period of open
enrollment, which the Senator from
Montana experienced when he came to
the Senate, to make choices, make an
evaluation of the various private
health policies that were offered to me.
As a result, my children and I have
that I am very pleased with.
want that same set of choices and set of op-
portunities for those whom I represent
and the people of this country.

My good friend Senator BENNETT has
joined me on the floor. I am going to
yield soon for him to speak.

I think the debate in the Senate has
reached the critical moment, at least
for this session of Congress. We know
we have to get action on major issues
in 2007. We are going to spend a lot of
time in the next few months dealing
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