Jeannie said the town budgets for a significant increase every year, with the hope it has budgeted enough. In 2008, the increase was 25 percent; the year before, it was 15 percent—40 percent in 2 years. No other town expense requires such a big year-to-year increase. Most others are budgeted to increase with the inflation rate.

The current plan with San Luis Valley HMO costs the town $804 a month and the employees $750 in out-of-pocket expenses. But that plan is no longer available. Jean said that similar plans from other providers would increase the cost premium anywhere from 33 percent to 235 percent. Even with the smallest cost increase, the total annual cost to the town will be close to $12,000.

Jeannie said—Jeannie told me her official name is Jean but that I could call her Jeannie; and she said everybody else does—Jeannie said:

> My [town] board now has to decide whether to accept the higher rates, reduce the coverage, require the employee to pay a much larger share of the premium, or try something else. It is not an easy decision.

Jeannie may have summed up the problem we face as well as anyone. She pointed out that:

> They should call it sick care not health care because the insurance companies do not pay to keep anyone healthy.

Because Jeannie cannot find another plan, hard decisions are being made about employees. We cannot continue down this path when we know health care costs are overwhelming businesses and working families.

Ann Brown and her husband Gordon run New Vista Image, a large-format digital design and printing company in Golden. The business has nine employees and provides health care benefits, covering 60 percent of each employee's premium but not that of their dependents.

Ann said she is happy with the choices available in Colorado for different types of plans, and she believes in the employer-provided benefits model. She and her husband built in the cost of health care when they began their business because she knew it would help attract the best employees.

Ann said she understands how important a healthy workforce is and supports wellness programs, so employees can prevent major medical conditions. Whenever she brings someone in, she knows the first question asked will be: Do you have a health care plan?

Nevertheless, the business has been forced to offer less and less coverage in order to keep premiums within its budget. Health care is one of the biggest ticket items they worry about. Ann said that in recent years, the percent cost increase over the previous year has been in the double digits. As a result, they have had to offer less coverage, with higher deductibles and more out-of-pocket costs.

The plan's deductible has gone from $1,500 to $3,000, and Ann said it is likely the next step they will have to take is a $5,000 deductible. She knows how hard those out-of-pocket costs can be for employees to absorb. A few years ago, when an employee was facing a serious health condition, the business covered the deductible so the employee would not be saddled with the medical bills.

''I would do it again,'' Ann said, although she knows higher deductibles mean a less generous plan to offer to her employees and less of a competitive edge for the business overall.

Teresa Trujillo of Pueblo, CO, has employer-based coverage. For 7 years, Teresa saved up money to buy a home, and then learned she had breast cancer. After 14 months of treatment, the money ran out and Teresa had to take a loan out to finish paying for the rest of her treatment.

For Teresa, her health insurance coverage only took her so far. While she has been cancer-free for 4 years, she constantly worries that her cancer will come back, and with it, the huge financial strain it would bring. All she wants is health care she can count on.

These are people who have done everything right, played by the rules, looked out for their fellow employees and fellow citizens. Our health care system is failing them. People should not have to wait until they get sick to learn their health insurance will not cover the cost of their treatments. Families should not have to watch their loved ones go through sickness and also deal with the anxiety of paying for medical bills that are increasingly becoming completely unaffordable.

We know health care reform will not be easy. As the President has said, if it were easy, we would have done it a long time ago. But for these Coloradans—for their families and for their businesses—the system must change. For our Nation's long-term prosperity, the system must change. We cannot burden future generations with responsibility for the reform we need today. If we make the hard choices, we will create a better health care system, a better economy, and a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

I thank my colleagues for listening this morning.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SOTOMAYOR NOMINATION

Mr. SPECTER. Madam President, I have sought recognition to comment briefly on the pending nomination of Judge Sotomayor to be an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court of the United States.

I have made it a practice to write to nominees in advance of the hearings in order to give advance notice to the nominee so that the nominee will be in a position to respond to questions raised without going back to read cases or consider the issues and facilitate the proceeding. I commented to Judge Sotomayor, when she had the so-called courtesy call with me, that I would be doing that.

In a letter dated June 15, I wrote her and commented about it in a floor statement, discussing in some detail the qualifications of Judge Sotomayor for the Supreme Court.

To briefly recapitulate, I noted in my earlier floor statement her excellent academic record and highest rankings in Princeton undergraduate and Yale Law School, her work as an assistant district attorney, her professional experience with a major law firm, her tenure on the Federal trial court, and her current tenure on the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Today, I am writing to Judge Sotomayor to give her advance notice that I will be inquiring into her views on televising the Supreme Court. I have long advocated televising the proceedings of the Supreme Court and have introduced legislation to require that, subject to a decision by the Court on a particular case if they thought the Court ought not to be televised. I think the analogy is very apt to televising proceedings of the Senate or the House of Representatives so that the public may be informed as to what is going on with these public matters.

The arguments in the Supreme Court are open to the public. Only a very few people have an opportunity to see them. First, it is not easy to come to Washington and, second, there are so many people who do come to Washington, but they are only allowed to be in there but a few minutes. With the marvel of television, this proceeding appears in the homes of many Americans on C–SPAN2, the House is televised on C–SPAN1, and many of our hearings are similarly televised. That is a great educational tool, and also it shows what is going on.

The Supreme Court of the United States, in a 1980 decision, Richmond Newspapers, Inc. v. Virginia, noted that a public trial belongs not just to the accused but to the public and the press as well. The Supreme Court noted that such openness has ''long been recognized as an indisputable attribute of an Anglo-American trial.''

Chief Justice William Howard Taft put the issue into perspective, stating:

> Nothing tends more to render judges careful in their decisions and anxiously solicitous to do exact justice than the consciousness that every act of theirs is subject to the intelligent scrutiny of their fellow men and to candid criticism.

In the same vein, Justice Felix Frankfurter said:

> If the news media would cover the Supreme Court as thoroughly as it did the World Series, it would be very important since ''public confidence in the judiciary hinges on the public's perception of it.''

The term ''press'' used in Richmond Newspapers would comprehend television in modern days. And certainly Justice Frankfurter's use of the term ''media'' would comprehend television as well.

It is worth noting that Justices have frequently appeared on television. Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Stevens appeared on ''Prime Time,'' ABC TV. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's interview on CBS by Mike Wallace was televised. Justice Breyer participated in Fox News Sunday and a debate between Justice Scalia and Justice Breyer was filmed and available for viewing on the Web.

There is no doubt of the enormous public interest in what the Supreme Court does. When the case of Bush v. Gore was decided, the block surrounding the Supreme Court Chamber, just across the green from the Senate, was loaded with television trucks. Although the cameras could not get inside, there was tremendous public concern. The decisions of the Court are on all of the cutting edge issues of the day. The Court decides executive power, congressional power, defendants' rights, habeas corpus, Guantanamo, civil rights, voting rights, affirmative action, abortion, and the list could go on and on.

In both the 109th and 110th Congresses, I introduced legislation calling for the Court to be televised. Twice it was reported favorably out of committee, but neither time did it reach the floor of the Senate. I intend to reintroduce the legislation and I intend to pursue it.

A number of Justices have commented about television. Justice Stevens said he favors televising the Supreme Court. He thinks, as he put it, ''it is worth a try.'' Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said she would support television and cameras as long as it was gavel to gavel. Justice Alito, in his Senate confirmation hearing, noted that when he was on the Third Circuit, he voted in favor of televising the proceedings, but had a reservation, saying if confirmed, he would want to consult with his colleagues about it. Justice Kennedy has said that he thinks televising the Court is inevitable. Chief Justice Roberts left the question open.

There is an obvious sensitivity in the Court if a colleague strenuously objects, and such a vociferous objection has been lodged by Justice Souter, who was quoted as saying, ''I can tell you the day you see a camera come into our courtroom, it is going to roll over my dead body.'' That is quite a dramatic statement. Justice Souter has announced his retirement. Perhaps in the absence of that strenuous objection, it is a good time for the Court to reconsider the issue.

I intend to ask Judge Sotomayor in her confirmation hearing whether she agrees with Justice Stevens that televising the Supreme Court is worth a try, whether she agrees with Justice Breyer that televising judicial proceedings is a valuable teaching device, whether she agrees with Justice Kennedy that televising the Court is inevitable. She can shed some light on the issue, because her courtroom was part of a pilot program where it was televised. There was a program from 1991 through 1994, where the Judicial Conference evaluated a pilot program conducted in six Federal district courts and 2 Federal circuits, and they found:

> Overall, attitudes of judges toward electronic media coverage of civil proceedings were initially neutral and became more favorable after experience under the pilot program.

The Judicial Center also stated:

> Judges and attorneys who had experience with electronic media coverage under the program generally reported observing small or no effects of camera presence on participants in the proceedings, courtroom decorum, or the administration of justice.

I think that is a very solid step forth from some of the Justices who have expressed concern that the dynamics of the Court would be changed. With the ability to put a camera in a concealed position and the findings of the Judicial Center that is a solid argument in favor of proceeding and, to repeat, I will continue to press the issue; and the confirmation proceedings of Judge Sotomayor will be a good opportunity to ask her about her experience when she presided over the trial under the pilot program, and to further develop the issue and perhaps stimulate some more public interest.

I commend to the attention of my colleagues the report of the Judiciary Committee on the legislation I had introduced in the 110th Congress. I cite Calendar No. 907, Senate Report 110–448 to Accompany S. 344, ''A Bill to Permit the Televising of Supreme Court Proceedings.'' It is lengthy, but I think it has a good summary to supplement the remarks that I have made to acquaint the public with the issue and the importance of it.

SYRIAN AMBASSADOR

Mr. SPECTER. Madam President, I compliment the President for his decision to send an Ambassador back to Syria. I am a firm believer in dialog. I believe that even though we may have some substantial questions about Syria's activities and Syria's conduct, we ought to continue the dialog. I believe in the famous maxim that you make peace with your enemies and not your friends. The derivative of that would be to talk to people who may be adversaries—not that I necessarily put Syria in an adversarial position, and I certainly wouldn't characterize them as an enemy. But the Ambassador was withdrawn 4 years ago as a protest to the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

The Security Council of the United Nations adopted a resolution on April 7, 2005, to establish an independent international investigating commission to inquire into all aspects of the terrorist attack killing Prime Minister Hariri. That tribunal has faced considerable obstacles, but it is still in operation, and I think its report would be very important in making a determination as to who was responsible for the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and whether Syrian officials were implicated in any way.

I do believe and have believed for a long time that Syria could be the key to advancing the peace process in the Mideast.

In connection with my duties as chairman of the Intelligence Committee in the 104th Congress and my work on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee during my tenure in the Senate, I have traveled extensively abroad and have concentrated on the situation in the Mideast. In connection with those travels, I have visited Syria 18 times and have studied the Syrian Government. I have gotten to know former President Hafez al-Asad, current President Bashar al-Asad, Foreign Minister Walid Mualem, who for 10 years was Ambassador to the United States and now is Foreign Minister.

It has long been my view that a dialog with Syria is very important. In December of 1988, I had my first meeting with Syrian President Hafez al-Asad, a meeting which lasted 4 hours 35 minutes. During the course of that meeting—President Hafez al-Asad was noted for his long meetings—we discussed virtually every problem of the world and every problem of the Mideast. It seemed to me from that meeting that President Asad was open to conversation. I have had many similar meetings with him. I was the only Member of Congress to attend his funeral in the summer of 2000. At that time, I met his successor, President Bashar al-Asad, and have gotten to know him, with meetings virtually every year in the intervening time.

There have been back-channel negotiations conducted through Turkish intervention between Israel and Syria, and I think dialog between the United States and Syria could promote future discussions between Syria and Israel. It would be my hope that the day would be sooner rather than later when Syria would be willing to talk to Israel directly. The Israeli officials, the Prime Ministers, have repeatedly stated their interest in direct conversations. Syria has resisted but has undertaken conversations through back channels. President Clinton came very close to effectuating—or made a lot of progress toward an agreement is perhaps more accurate to say—in 1995 when Prime Minister Rabin was in charge of Israel. In the year 2000, again, there was substantial progress made by President Clinton on those efforts. The back-channel communications brokered by Turkey suggest the time is right for promoting that kind of an effort.

Only Israel can make a determination as to whether Israel wants to give up the Golan Heights, which is key to