idea, understanding the current system is indefensible. Some of them come to the floor and it sounds as if they are reading right from the playbook of the health insurance companies. Oh, they talk about all the problems if we had a so-called public option—a public option. And it is just that: an option.

Well, if you do the math—and this is rough math, but pretty close—we have about 300 million people in America. Currently, about 40 million of these people are under Medicaid, the health insurance for the poorest people and disabled people in our country. Another 45 million are under Medicare, the health insurance for people over the age of 65. We have another large group of those Americans who have served our country covered by the veterans' health care system—one of the best in our Nation. Eight million people—and I am one of them—are part of the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. It is a program for Federal employees and Members of Congress and their staff. Then several million are under a plan of children's health insurance—a government-administered plan to provide that poor kids in families who are struggling have health insurance across America.

So more than one out of three Americans today has some form of government health insurance. The health insurance companies, the private companies, tell us this will ruin the system, if we had an option that was available such as Medicare for every family in America.

I think they are wrong. One of the most sensible things we could do would be to extend Medicare's reach. What if, in the next 5 years, we said we are going to start saying people at the age of 60 can start paying premiums to be part of Medicare—in a separate pool, but Medicare benefits—that they pay those premiums and they will have coverage. Well, it would mean some people would have a fighting chance then, as they reach the age of 60, to have basic health insurance coverage before Medicare. I would extend it even lower. I would extend it to the age of 50, and the Poll family would have been covered. They would have been able to buy basic Medicare protection for Dave and Claire that might have diagnosed this situation at an earlier point or reduced the cost. But it certainly would give them the peace of mind that they have access to the best care in America and will not lose their business and their home in the process.

I wait for the Republicans at some point in this debate to stop saying no and start stepping forward with some idea, some proposal, something that moves us on the path toward making this country an even healthier country, a country where the injustices of the current health care system are not part of our future and part of our country, but part of the past. That is the way it should be.

In the next couple weeks, we are going to start the debate on health care reform here in the Senate. It has been a long time coming. This idea first came up under President Teddy Roosevelt a century ago. President Harry Truman suggested universal health care 60 years ago. President Lyndon Johnson tried his best to move it forward 40 years ago. Fifteen years ago, President Clinton and Mrs. Clinton tried to move us in this direction. They never—none of them—reached the point we are going to reach now, where comprehensive health care reform will be on the floor of the Senate, to be actively and openly debated.

This is our chance. This is our historic opportunity. We cannot miss it. For the Poll family in Joliet, IL, we wish them the best and hope Claire gets well and feels well very soon. We hope they do not lose their family's savings, their home, and their business in the course of looking for the same basic treatment we would expect for anybody in this country.

This may be one of the few places on Earth—one of the few advanced countries on Earth—where you can literally be driven into poverty because of your illness. That is what has happened to this family, who paid their dues and kept their business open for 29 years. We could do better. I hope our Republican friends will stop saying no and join us in this opportune moment of making history for this Nation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

AFGHAN ELECTION RUNOFF

Mr. KAUFMAN. Mr. President, I rise to welcome today's announcement of a runoff election in Afghanistan, to be held on November 7. This second round is absolutely critical, and I commend the Electoral Complaints Commission for successfully investigating reports of fraud surrounding the August 20 vote. The ECC fulfilled its mandate, and I applaud the Afghan people for demonstrating patience and resilience throughout this very difficult process.

I also want to recognize the efforts of the chairman of our Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator JOHN KERRY, and Ambassador Eikenberry in Afghanistan to secure greater transparency and encourage a second round.

When I was in Afghanistan in April, there was great promise that the election would usher in a new era of hope for the Afghan people. But when I returned to the region in September, it was clear this hope had been dashed by allegations of election fraud. Each story of corruption further undermines the confidence of the Afghan people in their government, which has hemorrhaged endlessly since the August vote. Today's news of a runoff gives hope to the Afghan people that their voices and political aspirations will finally be heard.

On October 8, I gave a statement on the eighth anniversary of the war. In it, I highlighted governance as an essential component of our counterinsurgency strategy, particularly because our goal is to build support for the Afghan Government among the Afghan people. This battle for the hearts and minds is not between the Afghans and Americans; it is between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, a Taliban which has been bolstered by the allegations of fraud from the August vote.

Counterinsurgency cannot succeed in Afghanistan without a credible government. It is my hope that a credible Afghan partner can emerge from a second round of elections. Whether the winner is President Karzai or Dr. Abdullah, it is critical that the next Afghan Government take steps to root out corruption, improve security, and provide essential services to the Afghan people.

Just as the United States supports a transparent, fair election, we also support a transparent and effective Afghan Government that serves the interests of its people. It will be necessary to ensure that the mistakes made in August are not repeated in a second round. This is why the role of monitors should be strengthened to protect the integrity of the vote.

Afghan and international forces should also be present in sufficiently strong numbers to provide security and ensure that Afghan citizens can safely cast their votes. It is my hope that this second round will provide an opportunity to rectify problems encountered in August and, most importantly, help to build faith in government among the Afghan people.

As President Obama takes the time he needs to thoroughly consider all of our options in Afghanistan, issues of governance will inform this process because our policy is more than just about combat troop levels; it must include the promotion of effective governance, training of Afghan security forces, and economic development.

The Afghan people deserve a better and brighter future, and I hope this runoff election will bring them one step closer to their goal.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

STREAMLINE ALTERNATIVE FUEL VEHICLE CONVERSIONS ACT

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, last summer in my hometown of Tulsa, OK, when gasoline prices were near $4 a gallon, a person driving a compressed natural gas-powered car was able to fuel up for just 90 cents a gallon. This was when gasoline was at $4 a gallon. That was a savings of $3 a gallon. Consequently, I was the first in Congress to introduce a comprehensive bill to

promote the use of natural gas as a realistic alternative for the many Americans who were looking for price relief, which is about everybody. The bill I introduced was called the Drive America on Natural Gas Act.

A year later, I am encouraged to see that several Members on Capitol Hill have introduced similar bills promoting the use of natural gas and propane as transportation fuel. Last summer, I joined with Senator PRYOR to once again introduce a comprehensive bill to promote these fuels for America's drivers. Additionally, majority leader HARRY REID recently announced his firm support for natural gas vehicles and hopes to bring a standalone bill to the floor in the near future. I welcome the majority leader's support and encourage him to make this a priority for floor consideration.

One of the major components of my Drive America on Natural Gas Act addressed a desperate need to overhaul the EPA emissions certification process which effectively prohibits the ability of nearly all car owners the option to legally convert cars to bifuel operation. Bifuel is a car that can run on natural gas and via the flip of a switch go to gasoline. Now, why? With certification and emissions testing expenses ranging between $50,000 and $150,000 per conversion system type, the costs are prohibitive for the aftermarket conversion system manufacturers to produce these systems for more than just a handful of different vehicle models each year. These heavy costs are ultimately borne by the consumer. Due to the rigidity and the cost constraints of these regulations, the EPA has issued less than 300 certificates over the past 8 years—that is 300 certificates over the past 8 years.

This is a solution to the high price and the fluctuating price of automobile gas. Now, oftentimes the vehicle models eligible for conversion are only sold for a short period of time since the certification lasts less than a year before a conversion system manufacturer must decide it will rectify that particular system.

Today, I am pleased to join Senator WICKER, Congressman DAN BOREN from my State of Oklahoma, and Congressman HEATH SHULER to introduce bipartisan, bicameral legislation to simplify and streamline the EPA emission certification process for aftermarket conversion systems.

The Streamline Alternative Fuel Vehicle Conversions Act makes critical changes in five key ways so that vehicle conversions can become a commonplace option for all Americans:

First, our bill eliminates the need for subsequent yearly recertification systems that have already been certified. I might add that the EPA is a friend in this effort. They want these changes to take place as much as we do, but they are not able to do this right now. Under the current law, you have to get recertified, so we eliminate that problem.

Secondly, the legislation directs the EPA to establish criteria that would cover several different yet similar makes and models under a single certification conformity.

Here is the problem. We have an organization in Tulsa that has a conversion system where they can actually change the fuel and refuel and they can change conversions into automobiles. The problem is, the way the law is today you have to get paid for this conversion each time. It might be the same engine that has already been converted before, but if it is in a different model, you have to convert it again. This is something we are going to be changing.

The third thing we change is to instruct the EPA to allow the submissions of previously tested data if a vehicle or the conversion system has not changed in a way which would affect compliance—very similar to the last problem, but nonetheless it is in the current law.

The fourth thing we would do is direct the EPA to promulgate regulations to help conversion system manufacturers comply with potentially different onboard diagnostics—which is called OBD—requirements and compatibility. Since 1996, these onboard diagnostics systems have been required in all light-duty cars and trucks to monitor engine and emission components.

Finally, we clarify the treatment of vehicles which are beyond their useful life as defined by the EPA. These older vehicles, typically those that are at least 10 years old and have at least 125,000 miles, are by default regulated under the Clean Air Act's tampering provision, causing regulatory uncertainty. Our legislation would allow the conversion of these vehicles as long as the conversion system manufacturer for the converter is able to demonstrate that the emissions would not degrade due to conversion.

Over the past several months, this legislation has been through numerous drafting reiterations with the assistance of the Natural Gas Vehicles of America, the National Propane Gas Association, and the Environmental Protection Agency. As I said before, they have been very helpful to us. I especially thank the EPA for their input and assistance in helping us craft a bill which will aid the agency in their efforts to streamline their compliance. They actually want to streamline. This is not normally the case.

I am also encouraged by EPA's internal efforts to reform the process, and I am pleased that our bill will complement and enhance their actions.

By simplifying this compliance process, the Streamline Alternative Fuel Vehicle Conversion Act will not only incentivize conversion system manufacturers to offer more systems for additional vehicle makes and models but will eventually reduce the cost of these conversion systems for interested car owners, perhaps by hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

Ultimately, the legislation will allow Americans to choose whether propane- or natural-gas powered vehicles are right for their own individual and business needs while simultaneously preserving the country's stringent emission standards.

The promise of natural gas and propane as mainstream transportation fuels is achievable today—not 20 years from now or 25 years from now but today. It is something no one should be against. Stop and think about it. I know the price of gas is down to $3. In my State of Oklahoma, it is down to around $2 a gallon. But today's price for natural gas, a comparable gallon would be 90 cents, and that is one that would be stabilized. When we stop and think about the reserves that are out there in natural gas, what we can do and what is available for us today, it can only get better.

Hopefully, this bill will pass. I am very proud of the bipartisan support, the bicameral support. I encourage our colleagues to get involved in this very logical response to the high price of motor fuel.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, are we now in a period of morning business?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Yes, we are.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2010—CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2647, the Department of Defense Authorization Act.

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

The report will be stated.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2647), to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2010 for military activities of the Department of Defense, to prescribe military personnel strengths for fiscal year 2010, and for other purposes, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate and agree to the same with an amendment and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of October 7, 2009.)

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been