

above all, in my brief time today I want to focus on his commitment to improving K through 12 public education in the United States and expanding access to higher education, especially for those of modest means.

As my colleagues know, ROBERT C. BYRD was raised in the hardscrabble coal fields of West Virginia. His family was poor but rich in faith and values. And his parents nurtured in young ROBERT BYRD a lifelong passion for education and learning.

He was valedictorian of his high school class but too poor to go to college right away. Of course, that was in the days before Pell grants and loans and Byrd Scholarships. So he worked as a shipyard welder and later as a butcher in a coal company town. It took him 12 years to save enough money to even start college.

He was a U.S. Senator when he later earned his law degree. No other Member of Congress before or since has started and completed law school while serving in the Congress.

But degrees do not begin to tell the story of the education of ROBERT BYRD. He is the ultimate lifetime learner. It is like for the last seven decades he has been enrolled in the Robert C. Byrd School of Continuing Education.

Senator BYRD's erudition has borne fruit in no less than nine books he has written and published over the last two decades. We all know that he literally wrote the book on the U.S. Senate—a masterful four-volume history of this institution that was an instant classic that will bear the burdens of time. What my colleagues may not know is that he also authored a highly respected history of the Roman Senate. Now, there are some who think ROBERT BYRD served in the Roman Senate, but that part of the Byrd legend just is not so.

I have talked at length about Senator BYRD's education because this explains why he is so passionate about ensuring every American has access to a quality public education—both K through 12 and higher education.

One thing Senator BYRD and I have in common—and we always kind of talk about it when we get together—is we are the only two Senators whose fathers were actually coal miners. We are both the sons of coal miners, neither of whom had very much formal education. My father only went to the 8th grade. Actually, he only went to the 6th grade, but we will not get into that. But, anyway, he said he went to the 8th grade, but, like I said, I will not get into that. But coming from a poor background, Senator BYRD believes, as I do, that a cardinal responsibility of government is to provide a ladder of opportunity so everyone, no matter how humble their background, has a shot at the American dream.

Obviously, the most important rungs of that ladder of opportunity involve education—beginning with quality K through 12 public schools, and including access to college, vocational edu-

cation, and other forms of higher education.

During my 25 years in this body, no one has fought harder for public education than Senator ROBERT BYRD. As the longtime chairman and still the senior member of the Appropriations Committee, he has been the champion of education at every turn—fighting to reduce class sizes, improving teacher training, bringing new technologies into the classroom, boosting access to higher education.

In 1985, he created the only national merit-based college scholarship program funded through the U.S. Department of Education. Congress later named them in his honor. Originally, the Byrd Scholarships consisted of a 1-year \$1,500 award to outstanding students. Today, Byrd Scholarships provide grants of up to \$6,000 over 4 years.

Senator BYRD is a great student of literature, and I am sure he knows *The Canterbury Tales*—a lot of it, probably, by heart. Describing the Clerk of Oxford, Chaucer might just as well have been describing ROBERT C. BYRD. Chaucer wrote:

Filled with moral virtue was his speech;  
And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.

Senator BYRD is a great Senator and a great American. He has both written our Nation's history and left his mark on it. It has been an honor to serve with my friend, my longtime chairman, Senator BYRD, for the last 25 years.

Today, as he reaches yet another historic milestone that no other Member of Congress has ever achieved—and I daresay probably no one ever will—we honor his service. And we express our respect and our love for this remarkable U.S. Senator.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

#### CONGRATULATING SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I am glad I had the opportunity to hear the comments of the Senator from Iowa on Senator BYRD. We all have enormous respect for Senator BYRD. I had a chance this morning to say a word about him and to reflect on, among other things, that when I first came here as a young aide 42 years ago to Senator Baker, Senator BYRD had already been here for 10 years as a Senator.

So it is quite a span of history, and all of us have many stories, including the instructions he would give us to stand behind our desk when we vote, and not work at the table when we preside. He kept order in the Senate, and we are grateful to him for that.

#### HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I would like to say a word about health care. The Democratic leader, Senator REID, today announced that he has

completed work on a health care bill. We have been waiting for that. It has been written behind closed doors in Senator REID's office for the last several weeks, so we have not known exactly what might be in it.

We have had two pieces of legislation from the Senate, one written by the HELP Committee, upon which I serve, another one from the Finance Committee. Now a bill has come from the House of Representatives. It has actually been passed there. Now the Democratic majority leader will be bringing forward his version of the bill. The bill seems to grow each time we have a new one—a little faster than the Federal debt grows even. This one seems to be another 2,000-page, trillion-dollar bill.

But the point I want to make tonight is that the American people's response to this work will be what all of ours should be: We want to read the bill. We want to know what it costs. And we want to make sure we have time to understand exactly how it affects the health of each American.

This is the most personal kind of debate we could have about the health of every single American. It affects 17 percent of our economy. It is a dramatic proposal, an enormous amount of money, at a time when our debt has reached \$12 trillion. A great many Americans are concerned about Washington, DC, because we do not seem to have a check and a balance on the various proposals for Washington takeovers, more debt, more spending, more taxes. Tonight I would like to do a simple thing, which is not to make a Republican speech but to read a letter, or parts of a letter, and insert it in the RECORD, that was written by eight Democratic Senators on October 6 to Senator REID.

I think their words say a great deal about this bill and about how we should proceed on it. The letter is dated October 6, from eight Democratic Senators. It says, in part:

Dear Leader REID:

... Whether or not our constituents agree with the direction of the debate, many are frustrated and lacking accurate information on the emerging [health care] proposals in Congress. Without a doubt—

Say these eight Democratic Senators—  
reforming health care in America is one of the most monumental and far-reaching undertakings considered by this body in decades. We believe the American public's participation in this process is critical to our overall success of creating a bill that lowers health care costs and offers access to quality and affordable health care for all Americans.

And then, if I may read a couple more paragraphs from the letter from these eight Democratic Senators to the Democratic leader:

Every step of the process needs to be transparent, and information regarding the bill needs to be readily available to our constituents before the Senate starts to vote—

“to vote”——

on legislation that will affect the lives of every American.

The eight Democratic Senators continue: