

the McCain motion and has endorsed the legislation before us today. That organization, I say to my good friend, would never be endorsing a bill that was going to cut guaranteed benefits under Medicare.

Mr. BAUCUS. I wish to say something else to put this in perspective. That is according to analysis of Medicare Advantage plans from Oppenheimer Capital Fund, dated November 12 of this year, between 2006 and 2009. Their estimate is, Medicare Advantage accounted for nearly 75 percent of the increase in gross profits among the larger Medicare plans in the industry.

Let me say this:

... Medicare Advantage ... has been a huge driver—

Quoting from the Oppenheimer Capital Fund—

a huge driver of earnings growth for the industry in recent years. Between 2006 and 2009, we estimate that Medicare Advantage accounted for nearly 75 percent of the increase in gross profits among the larger plans in the industry, highlighted by an estimated gross profit increase of \$1.9 billion in 2009, relative to commercial risk earnings gains—

That is basic health insurance, not Medicare Advantage plans but basic health insurance—

of nearly \$600 million. Medicare Advantage probably won't be as much of a contributor in 2009—

But it is going to be a very large contributor in 2009 because of advantages they get.

Mr. WICKER. It is clear the Senator does not like Medicare Advantage. It is also clear no guarantee can be made that Medicare Advantage benefits will not be cut under this legislation. It is also clear there are tens and tens of millions of American senior citizens who like their Medicare Advantage, notwithstanding the Senator from Montana, and they stand to lose those benefits under this legislation.

Mr. DODD. Let me point out, one of the things we have not talked about, I say to my friend from Mississippi, under our legislation, this bill protects seniors in Medicare Advantage from plans that care more about profits than seniors, trying to pass the buck. Under our bill, it allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to kick out any plan under Medicare Advantage that significantly increases their premiums or decreases their benefits. Under existing law, that would not happen; under our bill, it does.

It is not about being hostile to Medicare Advantage. It is being realistic about all this and trying to make the tough decisions we have to make about trying to stabilize Medicare, seeing to it we are going to have protections in premium reductions and cost savings, as well as increasing access and quality.

All we are trying to point out is, when you have a Medicare Advantage plan that has run as poorly as this one has, at great cost we now learned—14 percent above, on average; some places it is 50 percent above average—where is the equity. By the way, I say to my

friend from Mississippi, it is a private health care plan that receives subsidies from the American taxpayers, where 80 percent of seniors today pay more and get nothing for it. Where is the equity in this? There is no equity in this. Why should 80 percent of that population pay \$90 or more a year, on average, for a benefit they don't get? Where is the equity?

Mr. BAUCUS. I might add, too, to remind us all, this legislation provides additional benefits for all seniors, including Medicare Advantage recipients—additional benefits. What are they? No copayment for certain preventive care—mammograms, for example, colonoscopies, screening benefits that are not in existence today. There are a whole host of other things that are additional.

This legislation provides additional benefits to Medicare Advantage members that are not there today.

When I say "guaranteed benefits," I am talking about the usual benefits seniors think of under Medicare. It is hospital care, it is nurses, it is all medically necessary physician care, diagnostic testing, supplies. It is home health care, preventive care, skilled nursing, hospice—all the things that are basically related to health care.

The only thing that might be trimmed back a little is, I call them the fringe stuff, the excesses, such as gym memberships. I wish I had the whole list because some of them are not related.

As I said earlier, they may not be cut. They don't have to be. It is up to the private companies whether to cut. I have nothing against companies making profits. They should make profits. It is our responsibility as Senators to make sure the reimbursement rates Medicare pays providers are fair and reasonable and not excessive. We have been told they are excessive. So we are trying to find a way to make it fairer.

Mr. WICKER. This segment of debate will end at the bottom of the hour, so it is almost over. I appreciate my friends yielding. This debate will continue for days, weeks. I say to my friends, there are Members on their side of the aisle who have come before this body and said these Medicare Advantage cuts are unacceptable. I think they are going to have to have a lot of convincing too. Democratic Members of the House have also come forward. I am not convinced. I don't think they are convinced.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

Mr. DODD. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent for 2 additional minutes.

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

Mr. DODD. Madam President, let me say to my colleague again that here we have two organizations representing 43 million seniors in our country, and these are organizations that don't just write letters on the fly. They have staffs that examine proposals here, and that is all they do. We have AARP, which is an organization that is highly

regarded and well recognized, representing 40 million seniors in the country, and the Commission to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, which represents an additional 3 million, and that is all they do. This is a totally nonpartisan examination. These two organizations, representing almost 50 million of our seniors, have examined this bill in detail—every dotted "I," every semicolon, every comma, every proposal—and have done exhaustive research, and they have said: This is a good bill. This bill is deserving of support.

We received a letter today from them. They are not Democrats. They are not Republicans. They are not trying to get an advantage over anybody. They are examining whether this bill stabilizes and strengthens Medicare, puts seniors in a stronger position, is going to see to it that we can extend the life of the program and provide guaranteed benefits that are needed, and their answer was a resounding yes—yes, this bill is deserving of our support.

Again, I appreciate the political debate here, but at some point we have to step back and let those whose job it is to analyze our suggestions and our ideas—just as AARP supported President Bush 6 years ago with his prescription drug bill. They didn't join Democrats or Republicans; they liked the idea—still do—and supported it. Today, they are not supporting us as Democrats. They would reject this bill out of hand if they thought we did something adverse to the interest of their membership. But they said: No, this is a good bill, deserving of support. The two largest organizations in this country representing seniors have said: Get behind this bill. Let's support our seniors. Let's make Medicare stronger and strengthen it. And this bill does it.

That is why we should be joining together, not fighting over this. Medicare Advantage is a private health care plan subsidized by the American taxpayer. Eighty percent of the seniors don't get the Advantage. That is why we are creating these changes in this bill.

I applaud my colleague from Montana, the chairman of the Finance Committee, who did incredible work, along with his staff and other members, in producing this product.

#### RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate stands in recess until 5:30 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 4:33 p.m., recessed until 5:30 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. WHITEHOUSE).

#### SERVICE MEMBERS HOME OWNER-SHIP TAX ACT OF 2009—(Continued)

(Mrs. SHAHEEN assumed the Chair.)  
Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.