

wage unconventional warfare, conduct high risk helicopter operations, or prosecute civil military and influence operations.

For those in today's USASOC, the pace is fast, the challenges great, but morale and job satisfaction have seldom been greater. The command's motto, "Without Equal", captures the spirit of its personnel and their commitment to maintaining the world's finest ground special operations force.

The command's missions, however, have not come without a sizable cost in lives lost. In the 8 years since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, 244 of USASOC's personnel have made the ultimate sacrifice. Their names are cast in bronze on a wall in USASOC's Memorial Plaza at Fort Bragg, NC.

In closing, the performance and contributions of Army Special Operations Forces in the Central Command theater of operations and around the world have been nothing short of magnificent. Whether in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Philippines, Trans-Sahara Africa or wherever friends and partners find themselves challenged by the forces of disintegration, oppression and extremism, Army Special Operators from across the Command's formations are unquestionably among America's most relevant answer to the threats our Nation faces.

TRIBUTE TO JIM PITCOCK

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, today I rise to honor the career of Jim Pitcock, a valuable staff member and more importantly a valuable part of the Arkansas community. Jim has been faithful and selfless in his service to the State of Arkansas, and his contributions will be sorely missed by me, my staff, and the many Arkansans who have had the great fortune of working with this wonderful public servant.

Jim has served on my staff from the very first day of my tenure as a Member of the U.S. Senate. His knowledge of the State of Arkansas and government has guided some of my most important decisions and for that I will be forever grateful. His wise, steady council is always held in high esteem. Jim has served several roles on my staff. His most recent role as senior caseworker has benefitted the people of Arkansas by assisting individuals, businesses and organizations that are experiencing difficulties with Federal agencies. Jim's leadership has set an expectation of excellence in constituent services.

Prior his work in the U.S. Senate, Jim was already a legend in Arkansas. He served as news director at Channel 7 in Little Rock for more than 30 years. During this time, Jim established an unprecedented system of archiving news coverage for historical purposes. Jim has witnessed and archived news from Governors Faubus to Huckabee and Presidents Johnson to Clinton. He also provided critical coverage of

major events in our State, such as the Damascus missile explosion, the Cuban refugee crisis and the great Arkansas Texas shootout football game of 1969. Following his departure from television, I was privileged to have Jim join my staff in the Arkansas attorney general's office in 2001 serving as the public information officer.

After so many years of faithful service to the people of Arkansas, Jim Pitcock has made a decision to retire from the Senate and his presence will be missed. He will continue to be a friend and adviser to me and I wish him all the best of luck as he begins this new chapter in his life.

Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in celebrating the outstanding career and service of Jim Pitcock to the U.S. Senate and the State of Arkansas.

THREE SISTERS SCENIC BIKEWAY

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, too many of our communities are hemorrhaging jobs. That is especially true in rural areas, where industries have suffered and companies have had to let lots of people go. In Oregon, for example, changes in forest policy have hit rural communities particularly hard in recent years. I am constantly working to find solutions that will help those communities not just survive but thrive.

It is indisputable that many rural communities and small towns in Oregon contain some of the most beautiful scenery in America. When I look at their future, I see that the scenic beauty and solitude of beautiful places like Sisters, OR, which sits in the shadow of the Cascade Mountains, can be a big engine to drive the economy. Investments in amenities like parks and scenic bikeways can be valuable for communities because they aren't fleeting. They build infrastructure that lasts for generations. The beauty of nature, especially out in the countryside, attracts tourists—particularly bicyclists.

The League of American Bicyclists estimates that biking contributes \$133 billion per year to our national economy, provides 1.1 million jobs, and generates \$17.7 billion in Federal, State, and local taxes. They estimate that another \$46.9 billion is spent on meals, transportation, lodging, gifts, and entertainment during bike trips and tours.

Savvy entrepreneurs in Oregon have come together to capitalize on the benefits that being a destination for bicyclists can bring to a community. Cycle Oregon—called "the best bike ride in America"—attracted 2,200 people from 44 States and 11 foreign countries to its 2008 ride, which took hardy bicyclists through some of Oregon's most beautiful sites. But it is not just Oregon entrepreneurs who have figured this out. It is a nationwide phenomenon. Bloomington, Indiana's "Hilly 100 ride," for example, draws

5,000 riders and over \$1 million in lodging and food sales. And in Iowa, the week-long Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa has become so popular that last year, they had to turn people away after more than 9,000 applied to cycle across the State.

It is often through outdoor events like bike races that you will find a CEO or company leader visiting Central Oregon on a vacation and having the brainstorm that it would make a great place to locate a new enterprise. Many high-tech companies, for example, are locating in places with unique, scenic beauty to set them apart from their competition in the big cities and to give them an added bonus to attract the talent they need to succeed.

I thought there must be a way to tap the full recreation potential of central Oregon and create a model that could be replicated in other parts of the country. So, 2 years ago I asked recreation leaders in Deschutes County to look at how recreation could add value to its recreation assets, creating the strongest possible engine for economic development.

Since then, the Sisters area has decided that much of its economy is tied to broadening the set of recreation experiences they can offer to visitors. They have developed many miles of new, spectacular mountain bike trails in the cascade foothills of Peterson Ridge as part of that effort. They see the development of a better cycling route to Bend as a vital addition to the menu of recreation opportunities in the area.

Community and business leaders from across Deschutes County have worked for the past two years on ideas like those developed in Sisters. They came together recently to formally launch an effort to create the Three Sisters Scenic Bikeway—a scenic bike route connecting each of the cities in that county, via cycling-friendly routes that take you past spectacular scenery.

Government officials are pitching in too. The Oregon Department of Transportation and the U.S. Forest Service are working together to implement the committee's vision of a paved bike path connecting Bend to Sunriver. The Forest Service is about halfway through their decision making process on a paved path from Sunriver out to Lava Lands Visitors Center, and ODOT is pursuing a variety of funding options to get the work done while crews are still working on the major reconstruction of Highway 97 nearby.

As we rebuild our country's infrastructure and seek new ways to create jobs, we would do well to follow the lesson of Deschutes County and The Three Sisters Scenic Bikeway. It was an idea that was first proposed by concerned members of the community. It answers local needs and they have a lot of confidence it will work. And as representatives of those communities, my colleagues and I have the ability to help water the seeds of those ideas when government can help out.

This kind of collaborative effort by local groups can be the kind of national model other struggling rural communities should consider as they work to rebuild their infrastructure and economies. Cities across America are realizing that investing in outdoor recreation options like bikeways is an affordable way to significantly improve their quality of life and, in the process, improve their competitiveness to attract new businesses and jobs.

It is time to remember that our infrastructure can't just be focused on ways to bring more cars onto our already stressed roads. Fixing highways and bridges is critically important, but for better health, relaxation, and the economic benefits they can bring, bikeways can also be part of the solution to fix our infrastructure and help revive struggling communities back home.

RESPONSE TO SLATE ARTICLE BY JACOB WEISBERG

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I would like to address an article written by Jacob Weisberg for Slate magazine on December 12, 2009. This article is entitled, "Are Republicans Serious About Fixing Health Care? No, and here's the proof." In this article, Mr. Weisberg unfairly and misleadingly takes aim at my position in the current health reform debate.

The author reports that I have criticized the Reid bill for creating an "indefensible new entitlement" and that it "expands the deficit, threatens Medicare, and does too little to restrain health care inflation."

I don't dispute Mr. Weisberg attributing these criticisms of the Reid bill to me. But, Mr. Weisberg can't dispute these serious shortcomings of the Reid bill that I and other Members on this side of the aisle have been discussing on the Senate floor for the past weeks. In fact, both the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, CBO, and the independent Department of Health and Human Services, HHS, Chief Actuary have confirmed that the Reid bill would not only establish this indefensible new entitlement, but also represent the largest expansion of government-run health care in history. But let me go through each criticism of the Reid bill that Mr. Weisberg has correctly reported.

The Reid bill will expand the deficit. Mr. Weisberg identifies the 10-year CBO score of the bill to be \$848 billion, but that is comprised of 10 years of Medicare cuts and tax increases and only 6 years of outlays. So if he were intellectually honest, Mr. Weisberg would have used the cost of 10 years of outlays, which budget analysts assume to be closer to \$2.5 trillion. But the use of budget gimmickry does not end there when supporters of the Reid bill claim that it is deficit neutral.

One of the biggest problems in Medicare that we have to address in Congress every year is the Medicare physician payment formula or the sustain-

able growth rate, SGR. Comprehensively fixing the SGR costs well over \$200 billion. Only providing a two-month temporary patch for the problem will result in a more than 20-percent drop in Medicare physician payments beginning in March of next year. To me and many other Members of Congress, health care reform includes fixing the SGR so that physicians can be assured of not facing drastic Medicare payment cuts year after year and so that beneficiaries can be assured of having access to physicians. But there is no SGR fix in the Reid bill. Do the math and you will see why. A comprehensive SGR fix of over \$200 billion would wipe away the \$132 billion in budgetary savings that the Reid bill is currently reported to have.

In fact, the Congressional Budget Office noted that the estimated cost of repealing the SGR and replacing it with a permanent freeze would be about \$207 billion once physician-administered drugs were removed from the calculation of the SGR formula. That was done in the physician rule that CMS finalized on October 30, 2009. However, according to CBO, the removal of those drugs from the SGR formula will increase Medicare's spending for physician services, as well as federal spending under TRICARE by \$78 billion over the 2010-2019 period. The net impact on the budget would be close to \$300 billion over 10 years, none of which is reflected in the Reid bill.

And let's take a look at what is in the bill. I certainly hope Mr. Weisberg did when he wrote his article. A good portion of the budgetary savings in the Reid bill is from the CLASS Act. This program apparently produces budgetary savings during the first 10 years, but only because no benefits pay out for the first 5 years. This makes the revenues outpace the program's outlays. But CBO has stated that outlays will outpace revenues after the first 10 years. This means that the CLASS act will result in deficit spending over the long run. In fact, the chairman of the Budget Committee, a Democrat, called the CLASS Act a massive government ponzi scheme. So this casts serious doubt on those who tout that the Reid bill is deficit neutral or saves money.

The Reid bill also threatens Medicare. I don't think Mr. Weisberg can argue that close to \$½ trillion in Medicare cuts won't jeopardize beneficiary access to care. Even the White House's own Chief Actuary confirmed that the Reid bill jeopardizes beneficiary access to care. He raised concerns in particular about two categories of these Medicare cuts. First, the Chief Actuary warned about the permanent productivity adjustments to annual payment updates. Under the Reid bill, these productivity adjustments automatically cut annual Medicare payment updates based on productivity measures of the entire economy. Referring to these cuts, he wrote that "the estimated savings . . . may be unrealistic." In his analysis of these provisions, Medicare's

own Chief Actuary stated, "it is doubtful that many could improve their own productivity to the degree achieved by the economy at large," and that they "are not aware of any empirical evidence demonstrating the medical community's ability to achieve productivity improvements equal to those of the overall economy." In fact, the Chief Actuary's conclusion is that it would be difficult for providers to even remain profitable over time as Medicare payments fail to keep up with the costs of caring for beneficiaries. Ultimately, the Chief Actuary's conclusion is that providers who rely on Medicare might end their participation in Medicare, "possibly jeopardizing access to care for beneficiaries."

The Chief Actuary even has numbers to back up these statements. His office ran simulations of the effects of these drastic and permanent cuts. And based on these simulations, the Chief Actuary found that during the first 10 years, "20 percent of Medicare Part A providers would become unprofitable as a result of the productivity adjustments." That's one out of five hospitals, nursing homes and hospices. It is for this reason that the Chief Actuary found, "reductions in payment updates based on economy-wide productivity gains, are unlikely to be sustainable on a permanent annual basis."

The second category of Medicare cuts that the Chief Actuary raised concerns about would be imposed by the new Independent Payment Advisory Board created in the Reid bill. This is the new body of unelected officials that would have broad authority to make even further cuts in Medicare. These additional cuts in Medicare would be driven by arbitrary cost growth targets. This board would have the authority to impose further automatic Medicare cuts even absent any Congressional action. The Chief Actuary gave a reality check to this proposal. He showed how tall an order the Reid bill's target for health care cost growth actually is. According to the HHS Chief Actuary, limiting cost growth to a level below medical price inflation "would represent an exceedingly difficult challenge." He pointed out in this analysis that Medicare cost growth was below this target in only 4 of the last 25 years.

The HHS Chief Actuary also pointed out that the backroom deals that carved out certain types of providers would complicate this board's efforts to cut Medicare cost growth. According to the analysis, "[t]he necessary savings would have to be achieved primarily through changes affecting physician services, Medicare Advantage payments and Part D." So providers like hospitals will escape from this board's cuts at the expenses of doctors, seniors enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans and seniors who will pay higher premiums for their Medicare drug coverage. If we surveyed the nation's seniors, I doubt very much they would say that raising their premiums for Medicare drug coverage or limiting preventive benefits in Medicare Advantage is