

of heated rhetoric around the issue of immigration. I ask that before any of them make a final decision, they step back and take a fresh look at the facts and the reality facing these youth.

Support for the DREAM Act is not only a matter of conscience for me since it is the right thing to do, it is also a practical solution. Continued delay is an irresponsible waste.

We owe it to the taxpayers who have invested in the education of these youth, the teachers who have fostered their development, and our military who can benefit from these new recruits to move forward on the DREAM Act. I plan to vote yes and strongly urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 3:30 p.m.

Thereupon, at 12:31 p.m., the Senate recessed until 3:30 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. MERKLEY).

PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE COOPERATION ACT OF 2009—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 30 minutes of debate equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

In the absence of anyone seeking recognition, time will be charged equally to both sides.

The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

EMERGENCY SENIOR CITIZENS RELIEF ACT

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, later on this afternoon, we are going to be voting on a very simple and straightforward piece of legislation called the Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act. This legislation is cosponsored by Majority Leader REID, Senators LEAHY, SCHUMER, SHERROD, BROWN, WHITEHOUSE, STABENOW, BEGICH, CASEY, GILLIBRAND, LAUTENBERG, and MENENDEZ.

What this legislation would do is, at a time when, for the second consecutive year, seniors and disabled veterans have received no cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, on their Social Security, this legislation would provide the equivalent of a 2-percent increase by providing them with a one-time \$250 check.

In addition to the Senate cosponsors, this legislation is supported by President Obama, and I appreciate that. It is also supported, for all the right reasons, by virtually every senior organization in the country and every veterans organization, because this benefits not just seniors, many of whom are struggling hard to pay their bills, when their health care costs and prescription drug costs are rising, but it also impacts disabled veterans.

Also supporting this is AARP, the largest senior organization in America; the American Legion, the largest veterans organization in America; VFW; National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare; Disabled American Veterans; The Alliance for Retired Americans; The National Association of Retired Federal Employees; The Vietnam Veterans of America; and many other veterans and senior organizations.

Just this morning, earlier today, 253 members of the House, including 26 Republicans, voted to provide the same \$250 COLA included in the bill that we are going to be voting on within a short time. So it won overwhelmingly in the House. In the House, they put it on the suspension calendar and it needed a two-thirds vote, but they didn't quite get that. I am confident that if we can come together here and get the 60 votes that we need, the House will reconsider the measure and pass it with a strong majority over there.

In the state of Vermont—and I think all over this country—seniors are wondering as to why they are not getting a COLA this year when they are experiencing significant increases in their expenses. And the reason they are not getting their COLA is that, in my view, we have a very flawed methodology in terms of how we determine COLAs for Social Security. What the Department of Labor now does is kind of combine all of the purchasing needs of all Americans—people who are 2 years old, kids who are 16 years old, and people who are 96 years of age. The flaw there is that while laptop computers, and iPads, and other communications technology may in fact have gone down, lowering the cost of inflation, the needs of seniors and what they spend money on have not gone down.

Most seniors spend their disposable income on health-related costs—visits to doctors, health care, prescription drugs. Those have in fact gone up. So it is unfair for seniors when all of the Americans' purchasing habits are combined, because I think what is not fairly appreciated is what they are spending money on.

To give you one example, the New York Times reported last year that 2009 marked the highest annual rate of inflation for drug prices since 1992, with the prices of brandname prescription drugs going up by about 9 percent. Seniors spend a lot of money, not on flat-screen TVs or iPads or computers but in fact on prescription drugs.

According to the AARP's Public Policy Institute, the average price of brandname prescriptions most widely used by Medicare beneficiaries rose by 8.3 percent from March 2009 to March of 2010.

Since 2000, Medicare Part B premiums have more than doubled, and deductibles have increased by 55 percent.

Seniors enrolled in Medicare Part D prescription drug plans have seen their premiums increase by 50 percent be-

tween 2006 and 2010, including an 11-percent increase between 2009 and 2010.

In other words, the seniors who are calling my office, and I suspect your offices, and offices all over this country, are saying: Excuse me, our expenses are going up and we need some help.

This is especially true for the millions of seniors and disabled veterans who are living on limited incomes. They are in trouble. Furthermore, what I would say is that, in the midst of this great debate we are having now on how we go forward in terms of taxes, there are a lot of seniors out there wondering how we can provide hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks for the top 2 percent, yet we cannot provide a \$250 check to a disabled veteran or a senior on Social Security.

This is a very simple piece of legislation. The House has already passed it with a strong majority. I hope very much we can pass it this afternoon.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa is recognized.

Mr. HARKIN. How much time do we have?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Five and one-half minutes.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I yield myself the remainder of the time. I see no Republicans on the floor now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, our first responders are genuine heroes. On a routine basis, they walk into burning buildings, confront criminals, and put their lives on the line to protect our families and communities. These dedicated workers are on the front lines every day, and they have invaluable skills and knowledge about how to best protect the public and stay safe on the job.

Unfortunately, under current law, many of our first responders have no voice in the decisions that affect their own lives and livelihoods. Their workplace input is disregarded because they are denied the same basic rights that other American workers enjoy. Currently, private sector employees are covered by the National Labor Relations Act and have the right to form a union if they choose, but we leave it up to States to determine whether police and firefighters have the right to form a union. Over half of the States allow collective bargaining, but almost 300,000 police officers and 141,000 firefighters nationwide are legally forbidden from exercising their basic, fundamental right to collective bargaining. That is an injustice to our police and firefighters and is inconsistent with American values. That is why I support the Public Safety Employee-Employer Cooperation Act, which would extend this basic right to thousands of brave public servants. This bill has the support of a broad bipartisan coalition of Senators.

The Public Safety Employee-Employer Cooperation Act protects the