

It protects America's oldest citizens by strengthening Medicare and extending its life for almost a decade. We are also taking the first steps to closing the notorious loophole known as the doughnut hole that costs seniors thousands of dollars each year for prescription drugs. These are some of the reasons the AARP—the American Association of Retired People—and its 40 million Americans are supporting this bill.

Contrary to what we heard from my distinguished friend, the Republican leader, premiums are reduced by 93 percent. Ninety-three percent of people who have insurance will have reduced premiums.

This effort also strengthens our future by cutting our towering national deficit by as much as \$1.3 trillion over the next two decades. What my distinguished Republican counterpart is saying is without basis in fact. These aren't numbers that I came up with, these are numbers that the Congressional Budget Office came up with—\$1.3 trillion. That is trillion with a "t." It cuts the deficit more sharply than anything Congress has done in a long time. It lowers costs. I have talked about Medicare.

My friend, the Republican leader, said it is going to reshape our Nation. That is why we are doing it. That is why we are doing this. We want to reshape the health care delivery system in our country. Is it right that America has 750,000 bankruptcies a year, about 80 percent of them caused by health care costs, and 62 percent of the people who have filed bankruptcy have health care costs? We are reshaping the Nation. That is what we want to do. That is what we have to do.

With this vote, we are rejecting a system in which one class of people can afford to stay healthy while another cannot. It demands for the first time in American history good health will not depend on great wealth. Good health should not depend on how much money you have. It acknowledges, finally, that health care is a fundamental right, which my friend Senator HARKIN spoke about so clearly—a human right—and not just a privilege for the most fortunate.

President Johnson, former majority leader of the Senate, signed Medicare into law when he was President, with the advice: "We need to see beyond the words to the people they touch." That is just as true today as it was 44 years ago when he signed that legislation.

This is not about partisanship or about procedure. And everyone knows we are here at 1 o'clock in the morning because of my friends on the other side of the aisle. For them to say with a straight face—and I know some of them didn't have that straight face—that we are here because of us is without any foundation whatsoever. And everyone knows that.

This is not about politics. It certainly is not about polling. It is about people. It is about life and death in America. It is about human suffering.

Given the chance to relieve the suffering, we must.

Citizens in each of our States have written to tell us they are broke because of our broken health care system. Some have sent letters with even worse news—news of grave illness and preventable death. For weeks, we have heard opponents complain about the number of pages in this bill, but I prefer to think of this bill in terms of the people it will help.

A woman named Lisa Vocelka, who lives in Gardnerville, NV—a beautiful city below the Sierra Nevada mountains—lives with her two daughters, both of whom are in elementary school. The youngest suffers seizures. Her teachers now think she has a learning disability.

Because of her family history, Lisa, the girl's mom, is at high risk of cervical cancer. Although she is supposed to get an exam every 3 months, she doesn't go. She is lucky if she goes once a year, and most of the time she is not very lucky. When Lisa lost her job, she lost her health coverage. Now both Lisa and her daughter miss the tests and preventive medicine that could keep them healthy. Her long letter ended with a simple plea. It was: "We want to be able to go to the doctor."

That is why this bill will ensure all Americans can get the preventive tests and screenings they need. I am voting yes because I believe Lisa and her daughter deserve to be able to go to the doctor.

A teenager named Caleb Wolz is a high school student from Sparks, NV. Like so many students, he used to play soccer when he was younger. Now he sticks to skiing and rock climbing. You can forgive him, I am sure, for giving up soccer. You see, Caleb was born with legs that end above his knees.

As children mature, even Caleb, they grow out of their clothes. Most kids grow out of their shoes. Caleb doesn't. A lot of kids probably get a new pair every year but Caleb has needed a new pair of prosthetic legs every year since he was 5 years old. Unfortunately and unbelievably, Caleb's insurance company has decided it knows better than his doctor and has decided Caleb doesn't need those legs. That is why this bill will make it illegal for those insurance companies to use preexisting conditions as an excuse for taking our money but not giving coverage.

This is a big change. But isn't it a good change? I am voting yes because I believe Caleb deserves a set of prosthetics that fit.

Ken Hansen wrote to me from Mesquite, NV, a town on the border of Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. He has chronic heart problems and parts of his feet have been amputated but Ken can't go to the doctor because he makes too much to qualify for Medicaid and too little to afford private insurance. I share with the Senate exactly what Ken wrote me:

I am very frustrated because it seems my only hope is that I die very soon, because I cannot afford to stay alive.

That is why this bill will expand Medicaid to cover people like Ken from Mesquite, NV, who are caught in the middle. I am voting yes because when someone tells me his only hope is to die, I think we have to take a close look at that. I can't look away. I cannot possibly do nothing.

A man by the name of Mike Tracy lives in North Las Vegas. His 26-year-old son has been an insulin-dependent diabetic since he was a baby. The insurance Mike's son gets through work will not cover his treatments and the Tracys can't afford to buy more insurance on their own. But his family's troubles are about more than just money. Since they couldn't afford to treat his diabetes, it developed into Addison's disease—which of course they can't afford to treat either. It could be fatal.

This is what he wrote to me 2 weeks ago:

I don't know what to pray for first: that I will die before my son will so I don't have to bear the burden, or that I outlive him so I can provide support to his family when he is gone.

Quite a set of prayers. This should not be a choice any American should have to make. It should not be a choice any father or mother should have to make—and when given the chance to help people like Mike, our choice should be very easy.

That is what this legislation is all about. These are hard-working citizens with heartbreaking stories. They are people who played by the rules and simply want their insurance company to also do the same. They are not alone. These tragedies do not happen only to Nevadans. They don't happen only to people who, despite all their pain, find time to write their leaders in Congress. These tragic events happen to people on the east coast, the west coast, and everywhere in between. These tragedies happen to Americans in small towns and in big cities. These tragedies happen to citizens on the left side of the political spectrum and on the right side. As Mike Tracy wrote in his powerful letter about his son:

Democrats need health care. Republicans need health care. Independents need health care. All Americans need health care.

Get it done.

He is right. Every single Senator, every one of us, comes from a State where these injustices happen every single day. Every single Senator represents hundreds, thousands of people who have to choose between paying an electricity bill or a medical bill; between filling a doctor's prescription or—well, maybe just hoping for the best—between their mother's chemotherapy treatment and their daughter's college tuition.

As I mentioned earlier, on average an American dies from lack of health insurance every 10 minutes. That means in the short time I have been speaking our broken system has claimed at least two lives. Another American has died, another American has died—two have died a preventable death, each of them.