

people—are either employees, employers, or members of the families of people employed in small business? Some 24 million people are without health insurance today because their chief breadwinner belongs to a small business that cannot afford health insurance.

I think that is just too many. The high costs of health insurance have made it difficult for small businesses to get the health insurance coverage they need. They do not have the bargaining power. They cannot spread the administrative cost. They cannot spread the risk. Basically, they cannot get as good a deal as a large corporation or a union or the Government can get.

We are very fortunate, as Federal employees, to have access to the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. That is because we have a great big pool and we can bargain to get the best rates and we have choices from health insurance providers. Those choices are not available to small business. So we have developed a plan, with the full support and leadership of the President, to authorize establishing association health plans. The time has come for those health plans to be set up by legislation.

On Monday of this week, we found that there has been a jump in the number of those Americans without health insurance. It is extremely timely.

Yesterday, I understand, the Secretary of Labor wrote to the majority leader and asked that we bring up and try to pass association health plans. It has already been passed by the House. It is just sitting here.

We need to pass it. I hope before we get out of here—I hope that is October 11; I am not sure from what the majority leader said whether we will make it by October 11—but before we go, I hope we have a vote on association health plans.

The Secretary of Labor has said this is the highest priority. And the Secretary of Labor would be the one who would regulate these plans to make sure they do not cherry-pick, that they are financially sound, and that they meet the requirements of the law.

The law is carefully structured to prevent picking out only healthy insured groups. You could not set up a group of fitness instructors, for example, in a health plan because that would take the lowest risk people and give them an unfair advantage over others, when health insurance is supposed to spread the risk over a broad population.

Association health plans are just one, but a very important, step we need to take in assuring that a significant number of those 24 or more million Americans who do not have health insurance get it.

This is something I have heard from small business groups, as I have listened to them in my State and across the country, in forums of all sizes. We get e-mails. We do not get letters very

often; they still get held up in the radiation process, but when we do get letters, they are still talking about the high cost of health care.

Association health plans are one way we could give small business the power to deal with the high cost of health insurance. I have spoken to my colleagues about this before. This has been an item of great interest in our Small Business Committee. I hope more colleagues will look into this question of getting adequate and affordable health insurance coverage through association health plans.

The President has made a very strong and clear statement in favor of association health plans. I would hope this body could follow the leadership of the House of Representatives, which has already passed the association health plan legislation. This would be something very important we could do for small businesses and their employees and their employees' families.

Madam President, I am happy to respond to questions from my colleagues to provide them further information. I invite their attention and I hope we can get action on that measure.

Madam President, I yield the floor. Seeing no one seeking recognition, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOND. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

ELECTION REFORM

Mr. BOND. Madam President, I was interested to read in today's Washington Post an editorial urging us to move forward on the election reform bill. This bill has been championed by Senator DODD, the chairman of the committee, and Senator MCCONNELL, the ranking member. I have had a role in some antifraud provisions.

The Florida elections of this year seem to have brought more attention to the need for election law reform. The conclusion of the Washington Post is that:

At a time when voter turnout is at an all-time low, bolstering public confidence in the machinery of democracy is especially urgent.

I agree with that. That is why I worked so hard to see if we could get a bill passed that would do that. We need to make it easier to vote and tougher to cheat. Unfortunately, what we saw in Florida this year was the old truth: No matter how much appropriations in or what kind of legislation you have, if you have incompetence in local election officials, incompetence trumps everything. We know there were tremendous problems this year in an area where there were problems in 2000, even though they had new machines.

Nevertheless, we have worked on a bill that has many compromises and

has a good structure for getting the kind of equipment we need to improve elections, providing additional safeguards, voting machines for those with disabilities and, in my view, the very important role of preventing dead people, nonexistent people, and dogs from voting.

Many of my colleagues don't want to hear me talk anymore about Ritzzy Mekler, the dog that was registered in Missouri. Unfortunately, Ritzzy joins a very distinguished group of dogs registered to vote around the country because motor voter does not have protection against phony registration.

We spent more than 7 months last year negotiating a bill. We brought it to the floor. There was some backsliding. We got it passed late this winter. It has been stalled in trying to work out the final details.

I have been discouraged because I have worked with the leaders from the other side on the bill to offer some compromises. We want to get the bill passed. I believe, along with Senator MCCONNELL, that we have proposed reasonable means of dealing with the problems they have. Unfortunately, the negotiations at the staff level have been stymied. Every time we get the wheelbarrow full of frogs, we find, as we try to wrap up the final details and get the final frogs in, some of the frogs have jumped out of the wheelbarrow.

Election reform is another bill that is long overdue for passage. I see my colleague from Kentucky in the Chamber who has been a champion in this area. I appreciate working with him and Senator DODD. I hope we can work with our colleagues on the House side, if we will just move forward and deal with some very important protections against more fraud in voting.

Since I see the manager of the bill is ready to go, I yield the floor.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I also see my friend from Kentucky. I want to go back to the bill.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I say to the Senator from Vermont, I am looking at 10 max, probably less.

Mr. LEAHY. I am wondering, I know the distinguished Senator from Kentucky can say more in less time than most people I know, and brilliantly. Could he perhaps say it in 5 minutes?

Mr. MCCONNELL. If I could beg the indulgence of the Senator from Vermont, this is a speech I have hoped to make on homeland security for some time now. We are only talking about 10 minutes. I would appreciate the opportunity to make the statement.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I am trying to be helpful. I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Kentucky be recognized for 10 minutes and then the floor revert to the senior Senator from Vermont.

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

The Senator from Kentucky.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, the homeland security bill is being held up because some labor unions want to put their special interests ahead of the collective interests of the Nation's security. Remember, these unions are not fighting against any increase in the President's authority to override collective bargaining agreements in the interest of national security. No, they actually want to roll back this authority that every President has had and has used since President Jimmy Carter.

How do union special interests affect national security? Here are just a few examples:

In 1987, a union objected to renovating border protection areas at Logan Airport—the same airport used by the 9-11 hijackers.

In 1990, a union prevented the INS from adding extra immigration inspectors in the Hawaii airport because it might affect the overtime pay of existing workers.

In 2000, a union objected to a Customs Service drug interdiction along the Florida coast because it would interfere with vacation days.

Let me say that again. In 2000, a union objected to a Customs Service drug interdiction along the Florida coast simply because it would interfere with vacation days.

So why are our colleagues on the other side advancing the labor union's agenda? Well, let's take a look at this chart. Four of the five major public sector unions who are publicly pushing for the Lieberman bill have showered over 93 percent of their campaign contributions to Democrats. The fifth contributed 87 percent.

Here are the top contributors supporting the Lieberman bill: American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees contributed 99 percent of their funds to Democrats; American Federation of Teachers, 99 percent; International Association of Fire Fighters, 87 percent; American Federation of Government Employees, 93 percent; and National Treasury Employees Union, 94 percent.

When it comes to the accusations of linking campaign contributions to political payoffs, my Democratic colleagues and their friends in the media continue to believe influence pedals down a one-way street. Remember the energy bill? You could hardly sit down to breakfast in the morning without reading about how Republicans were shamelessly catering to big oil and big energy interests at the expense of the environment. These accusations have blared forth from every corner of the media establishment. The New York Times—surprise, surprise—on several occasions editorialized about big money driving the energy bill, essentially viewing it as a payoff to oil companies and their friends in the adminis-

tration, which include “the biggest and dirtiest utilities.”

The Boston Globe judged a House-passed energy bill as “little better than the one cobbled together by Enron, other utilities, and big oil for the Bush administration.”

The Fort Worth Star ominously warned of the “propriety of allowing big contributors to shape public policy to their personal benefit.”

The Greensboro, North Carolina News and Register declared “clearly something is wrong when big business shapes the nation's energy policy.”

This rhetoric also blared forth from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who charged this bill was “crafted behind closed doors,” and that it “looked like the Exxon-Mobil report,” and that Exxon-Mobil, Enron, and Chevron enjoyed an excess bonanza at the expense of consumers.

Finally, the rhetoric blares out of our television sets every Wednesday night at 9 o'clock on the “West Wing,” a 60-minute political commercial masquerading as a television drama. On the premiere last week, the pretend president proclaimed, “The Republicans are busy. They are trying to convince us that they care about new energy and that they are not in the vest pockets of big oil, and that is a tough sell.”

He then charged, “This isn't the time for people whose doomsday scenario is a little less at the pump for Texaco and Shell. This isn't a time for people who say there aren't any energy alternatives just because they can't think of any. This is the time for American heroes, and we reach for the stars.”

Mr. President, this is a gift from NBC and GE to the Democratic Party, financed by millions of—you guessed it—corporate dollars. That is what the “West Wing” has been. I hope Senators don't dispute these corporations have a right to express political opinions. I do not believe political donations dictate public policy. In fact, I have been vigorously involved throughout my career defending the right of all these entities to contribute to the candidates of their choice and say, through issue advocacy, whatever they choose to say during the course of a year.

But as long as people are going to make that charge, they ought to do it evenly. For those who do believe contributions impact policy, then let's, in the name of basic fairness, apply the same scrutiny to unions on the homeland security bill that the New York Times, NBC, and my Democratic colleagues applied to energy companies on the energy bill. If they did, here is what they would find. The biggest public sector unions—American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; the American Federation of Teachers; International Association of Fire Fighters; the American Federation of Government Employees; and the National Treasury Employees Union—give almost 9 out of every 10 cents to Democratic candidates. Their

agenda to weaken the President's national security powers is being advanced by the beneficiaries of those contributions. But we are hard-pressed to find anybody or any hotly accusatory stories in the New York Times or on CNN.

Remember, Madam President, when corporate corruption called for a corporate accountability bill, unions—many of which were knee-deep in financial corruption themselves—rallied to block a very modest amendment to require better disclosure, simple disclosure on union financial reports.

So where are the editorials in the New York Times? Where are they connecting the dots and condemning the specter of influence peddling? Where are the rants from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle against the influence-peddling of big union bosses? Where is that episode of the “West Wing”—you know, the one where the pretend president tells Josh and Sam, above the obligatory orchestral crescendo, how much he yearns for “American heroes” to sever the menacing hold unions have on the homeland security bill?

I could settle down in my favorite chair every Wednesday night at 9 p.m. waiting for that episode, but I am not a fool. My mother didn't raise any children as fools. I know that would be a wait in vain, for there are too many other Republican bogeymen to expose, too many conservative policies to mock with the elitist derision only Hollywood can muster, too many ways to stage easy political victories that real-life Democrats are simply unable to win in Congress because too many hard-working Americans do not believe in them.

I call on my colleagues to put aside the pet grievances of the labor unions and return to the task at hand because I just don't see how any of us can go home and explain to the families in our States we may be giving the President less power to protect them than he had before September 11.

So it continues to be my hope we will be able to get an up-or-down vote on the President's homeland security bill. It seems to me that is not asking too much. I know the Senator from Texas, and others, have spent an enormous amount of time to see to it the President's proposal at least gets an up-or-down vote in the Senate.

I yield the floor.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I come to the floor today in opposition to the Lieberman Homeland Department proposal and in support of the Gramm/Miller, administration-supported, bipartisan substitute. As Senator GRAMM and others have so ably demonstrated, the Lieberman proposal takes away the President's existing authority to exempt personnel in the new department from collective bargaining requirements when national security requires it. The substitute reinstates the President's authority in this area.