

for me as a political scientist, but he registered by postcard.

After the 2000 election, when we found tremendous vote fraud problems in St. Louis, they had a mayoral election scheduled for the spring of 2001. The last day of registration, 3,000 postcards showed up to register voters for that election. It did not take long for observant election officials to note that all of those cards appeared to be in the handwriting of one or two people. They started checking and they found that, lo and behold, there were a lot of phony people registered.

Terribly, the deceased mother of the prosecuting attorney of the city of St. Louis was registered to vote. This brought about some action. Several of the people involved in that little process came together and decided to destroy the records. Since that time, I have read in the paper that the prosecuting attorney in St. Louis has filed significant criminal indictments for those people.

However, I am proud to say that the St. Louis City election board is using new laws passed in the State of Missouri to tighten up on these postcard registrations. Prior to the Help America Vote Act, you couldn't even check on people who registered by mail. The process for getting voters off the list, if they are improperly registered, was byzantine, and took years to do. But under the Federal standards, there are still areas where these nonexistent or duplication voter registrations can be made by mail.

We provided new powers and new responsibilities for local election officials in the Help America Vote Act. We promised to fund them. So during the process of debate on the appropriations bills, Senator DODD of Connecticut, Senator MCCONNELL of Kentucky, the Chair, and the ranking member of the Rules Committee, when this passed, came to the floor and I supported them. We got over \$1 billion to fund the Help America Vote Act. That languishes in the omnibus appropriations bill. That money is necessary to support local efforts to carry out the mandates under the Help America Vote Act.

We all thought that once we passed that law we were going to ensure honest elections in 2004, elections where everybody entitled to vote could vote. The problem is, if we don't get around to passing the funding for the Help America Vote Act until we come back next year, the process drags on and on and we are probably into March before the money goes out—which is too late to make many of the changes and to build the infrastructure and to buy the equipment that is needed to carry out the requirements of the Help America Vote Act.

I have talked with other Senators about the many important measures that are included in that Omnibus Appropriations Act. But I want to call the attention of my colleagues to some further information that I have developed about the Veterans Affairs budget.

Senator MIKULSKI and I fought long and hard to get the funding that we needed to try to catch up to the backlog in the VA. People with service-related injuries, permanent disabilities, low-income people, homeless people, are being denied, for months, the ability to get in to see a doctor because so many new enrollees have come into the system. This body expanded the eligibility. We expanded the eligibility, but the money has not kept up. So we are trying to play catchup, and there is an additional \$2.9 billion above this year's funding level for the VA that cannot begin until the bill is signed. We are already a couple of months into the fiscal year 2004. We would be 6 or 7 months in before we could get funding if we wait until next year.

My staff tells me there are a number of other things that will happen. Specifically, noninstitutional long-term care cannot be increased. The VA has placed a high priority, providing a high quality of life, long-term care for each veteran. The VA planned to expand the program by over 20 percent this year because of the demand. The VA, without these funds, will not be able to expand the long-term care services under the fiscal year 2003 funding authority.

Second, pharmacy costs will continue eating the budget. For fiscal year 2003, pharmacy costs rose over 11 percent and the VA is incurring increasing demands for prescriptions each month. The continuing rise in demand for prescriptions is stripping funds from other priority areas as VA continues to operate under last year's funding levels.

Third, new community-based outpatient clinics will be curtailed. The VA has 48 high-priority community-based outpatient clinics ready to go that can't move forward because they don't have the funds under the continuing resolution.

Finally and most important, and something I hope will be significant to each one of us here, the waiting lists will continue to lengthen. Continued operations under a continuing resolution will force VA to curtail hiring of new physicians and nurses. The VA experiences about a 1-percent normal attrition rate of physicians per month. By January, VA's waiting list will rise by over 10,000 from the projected level.

VA patients, who should be getting our top priority attention, are going to find the waiting list longer. That is why I renew my appeal to the leaders on both sides to deal with the omnibus appropriations, to come to some agreement, either to take this on UC, or take it by voice vote, with the distinguished chairman and ranking member on our side and the other side to come to closure on it, or, if need be, bring us back in session.

The House is going to come back into session on December 8, I understand, and vote on the bill. We have an obligation to come in—either if there is a unanimous consent agreement granted to do it by voice vote or if there is not—and do what we are paid to do and

that is to vote up or down and pass the appropriations that are so essential for many areas where continuing resolution funding will be inadequate.

I urge the leadership to work on this. We need it in many areas.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. DOLE). The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. BINGAMAN. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. BINGAMAN pertaining to the introduction of S. 1966 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I have some remarks I would like to make shortly, but I know Senator LAUTENBERG got here before I did. He told me he had about 10 minutes. I know the majority leader may have some remarks, and, of course, I would defer to him.

Unless there is objection, I would like to ask—well, I will just defer to the majority leader at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. FRIST. Madam President, if I could just take 3 or 4 minutes, and then I know the distinguished Senator from New Jersey has his comments to make.

#### THANKING THOSE WHO WORKED ON THE MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG AND REFORM BILL

Mr. FRIST. Madam President, I, just very briefly, want to thank people for a lot of hard work over the last several months.

Earlier today, we did pass a historic bill that is notable for the fact that it does help so many people in a very direct way. I think it is gratifying to all of us as U.S. Senators. But that outcome is made possible by a lot of hard work. I will be very brief, but I do want to thank the appropriate people. Again, I leave out so many people.

But, first, I thank the President of the United States. President Bush does deserve credit for making this vision of being able to reach out and help people as soon as possible in a direct way with prescription drug coverage possible. That vision really did set the template for all of us. We pulled together and passed this bipartisan bill.

Secretary Tommy Thompson, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Tom Scully, the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, spent literally hundreds of hours working on this legislation.

I participated on the conference committee and had the wonderful opportunity of working side by side with them, consulting with them, seeking counsel, receiving their input.

In the Senate, Finance Committee chairman, CHUCK GRASSLEY, and ranking member, MAX BAUCUS, really did put partisanship aside from day 1,

when we first started this Senate bill, and worked tirelessly from beginning to end to deliver on the promise that we all have to the American people. In large part it was accomplished because of their work and their partnership in many ways.

Senator JOHN BREAUX deserves huge credit. I have worked with Senator BREAUX over the last 7 years. There was a Breaux-Frist bill that came out of the Bipartisan Commission. He has demonstrated real leadership and, in my mind, has been at it in terms of the final product longer than anybody in the Senate, working together on the model we ended up with.

All members of the conference committee showed a degree of dedication and resolve that is seldom seen in either Chamber. There were Senators ORRIN HATCH and DON NICKLES and JOHN KYL. We simply would not have reached this point if we had not worked together with strong leadership on the part of the conferees.

In addition, there were people such as Senators JEFFORDS, GREGG, HAGEL, ENSIGN, WYDEN, and SNOWE, who have focused on a tripartisan, bipartisan approach to health care reform, which has been instrumental in many ways.

Senators BUNNING, THOMAS, SMITH, LOTT, and SANTORUM all made huge contributions working through the Finance Committee.

Members of this body who voted against final passage also contributed in remarkable ways to this product.

I do also want to mention, just in passing, the House leadership because the House leadership, especially Speaker DENNIS HASTERT and Leader TOM DELAY, deserve very special recognition. I worked very closely, and our leadership worked very closely with them, especially in the final 2 weeks of that conference.

I had the opportunity to call yesterday Chairman BILL THOMAS. He is really the mind behind what we accomplished. He was able to assimilate very complex policy and put it into a portrait that ultimately became the substrate for this bill. He demonstrated real leadership, real patience.

Also, chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Chairman BILLY TAUZIN, we simply would not be here without his active participation as well.

My dedicated staff—Dean Rosen, Elizabeth Scanlon, Rohit Kumar, and Craig Burton—put in hundreds of hours and poured over thousands of details. Lee Rawls, Eric Ueland, David Schiappa and his wonderful staff here really made it possible.

So in closing, to everyone who worked so hard and have given so much of themselves, working hard on this effort, I thank them. I thank you, the Senate thanks you, America thanks you, and, most of all, America's seniors thank you.

Madam President, I appreciate the Senator from New Jersey giving me the floor for those few minutes. I look for-

ward to listening to what he has to say on a very important issue.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Madam President, first, I want to say thank you—

Mr. CORNYN. Will the Senator yield for a brief UC?

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Sure.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that following the remarks of the Senator from New Jersey—I believe he told me he would speak for about 10 minutes or so—I be recognized for remarks that I might make at that time.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, reserving the right to object, and I will not object, I wonder if the Senator might add to that UC—about how long does the Senator plan to speak, so I could then try to amend that UC to place myself in order?

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I would make my remarks no longer than 15 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I ask the Senator if he would modify his unanimous consent request to allow the Senator from Michigan, and then I believe the Senator from Washington, to each have 10 minutes following his remarks?

Mr. CORNYN. That is acceptable.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. LAUTENBERG. No objection, Madam President.

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

The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Madam President, I would just note that the gracious statement of the Senator from Texas said "10 minutes or so." I would hope, for clarification, if "or so" is 3 or 4 minutes longer, it will not be a violation of the unanimous consent agreement that we just heard.

#### COMMENDING THE MAJORITY LEADER

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Madam President, before the majority leader leaves the floor, I want to say that I have been back here about a year now, and working with the majority leader, when he took office, has been an interesting and a positive experience. We are all cognizant of the wonderful work that Dr. FRIST has done in his time before the Senate and how he served populations so desperately in need. He took the risks and the time necessary to do that.

We all congratulate him for that, for his generosity of spirit, and his skill as a surgeon and physician.

I have found on the rare occasions that I—I hope they are rare—called on Senator FRIST for an ear, he was more than willing to lend it. If he disagreed, he said so. And if he agreed—even rarer—that was done with dispatch and a straightforwardness which I greatly

respect. I hope he and his family will enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday.

As we muse over what happened in the last week, since Senator FRIST is a physician, I hope he can prescribe a way we can heal some of the bruises that occurred in this last contentious period.

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 1602

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Madam President, it is about 26 months since the assault on our families, our people, and our invincibility that took place at the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon, and in a field in Pennsylvania where it was so heroically disrupted on its way to a target. Therefore, I am outraged that we can't find enough time to further pay attention to the memory of the 9/11 victims by passing a bill to extend the deadline for victims' families, enabling them to apply for victims' compensation which is in a fund that was passed in the Senate and passed in the House and that is about to expire.

Though we have just been through a difficult and contentious period with some acrimony, no matter how much I or others might have agreed with the outcome, our business for this year is not yet done. We are facing the expiration of this compensation fund, and there are lots of families who have yet to participate in this program that was designed for them.

The need for this 9/11 victims bill is urgent. If we don't vote on it before Thanksgiving, this bill will become obsolete because the current filing deadline is December 22, 2003.

We are reminded that a truly joyous part of the year is just beginning. It starts with Thanksgiving, goes through to Christmas and Hanukkah. It is just around the corner. A lone, anonymous Republican Senator is holding up a bill that would make these holidays less stressful for the 9/11 families. As we requested or will request in a unanimous consent request, the Senate must take up and pass this bill today in order to fulfill our commitments to compensate the victims' families.

So far, out of approximately 3,000 killed, about 1,800 families, or only 60 percent of those eligible, have filed claims on behalf of relatives who were killed. This is far too low a percentage.

Helping the families of 9/11 victims is not just the responsibility of the Senators in the Northeast, it is a national commitment we made that we owed to those who suffered on that tragic day. I am distressed by the fact that because of somebody in the majority, having just spent 39 hours of time talking about a handful of judicial nominees, we can't even commit a few minutes today to take up a simple but critical bill and pass it.

The bill is vital to thousands of Americans who lost loved ones or who were themselves injured in the 9/11 attacks. Many of these families will mourn forever. Many of these families