

If some in Washington have their way, infants may not have immunizations, children may not have school lunches, and high school students may not have summer jobs, and students may not have loans to foster their education. More importantly, senior citizens may not have the opportunity for quality health care.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest if these new thinkers in Washington really want change, they should indeed change the minimum wage. They should have meaningful change. They should change the tax cut that they are proposing and make sure that they not only give a break to the wealthiest Americans, but give a break to all Americans. If they want real change, they should restore school lunches for children who need it. If they want to make significant change, they should change their mind about cutting Medicare and cutting Medicaid.

Mr. Speaker, I am fully aware that these are difficult times and we all must and should be expected to make sacrifices. That is the point, that all of us should make the sacrifice, not just the poor.

One of our priorities must be to reduce the Federal deficit. However, I believe we can achieve a better and more efficient use of our spending priorities without cutting education programs that have been the national priority for many years, without eliminating job programs that provide hope and a way out, without cutting nutritional programs that allow children to grow and live, without cutting farm programs that produce the food for all of us to eat, and without cutting Medicare and Medicaid. Medicare and Medicaid is a true contract with America.

Mr. Speaker, we are strong because historically we have been able to make a place for all who live here, including those who are least able to help themselves: the young, the old, the poor, the frail, and the disabled. What makes us a great Nation is the compassion we show to those who live in the shadow of life.

In this time of increased scrutiny, I believe we must examine each and every program, but we must also consider each and every person affected by our changes. We must ask the question: who is helped and who is hurt?

Mr. Speaker, we live in a time of many problems, yet we live in a time of much promise. It concerns me that there are so many young people these days at the sunrise of their lives engaged in such destructive behavior as teenage pregnancy, drugs, and killing each other. Those are some of the problems. Too many are planning their funerals instead of their future.

The hope for America rests with our young people; our children truly are our future. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the majority in Congress has launched an assault on the education of young people and other programs like nothing we have ever witnessed in the history of our Nation.

Under the pretense of "gliding toward a balanced budget," their assault is relentless and damaging for all. The Labor-Health and Education bill, which passed recently, clearly demonstrates the difference between the policy of the Democrats and the extreme policies of the Republican majority. But worse, the bill ignores the pain it will cause to children, youth, and the elderly of America.

Rather than promoting education, the bill is an obstruction to education. Half of that bill, some \$4.5 billion, comes from education. Title I is cut by \$1.1 billion, and nine critical basis education opportunities which make our nation strong.

Mr. Speaker, this is no way to build America. I ask all of our colleagues, the time is not too late to change our minds and make sure we carry ourselves on the right path to restoring America.

THE CLOCK IS TICKING ON MEDICARE REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, today is Wednesday, and the House is back in session. I was told that today in the Committee on Commerce, which I am a member of, that we were going to have a Medicare bill from the Republican leadership and that we would begin marking up the Medicare bill today. Of course, we did not receive a bill. We do not know when we are going to receive a bill. The latest information is that apparently a bill may be forthcoming either Friday or sometime over the weekend, or maybe not for another week or so.

So the clock keeps ticking and still Speaker GINGRICH and the Republican leadership have not given us a Medicare bill. I think it is very unfortunate. We really do not know what the Republican leadership is proposing with these vast changes in Medicare that have gradually been leaked out, and we certainly have not had any opportunity for any real hearings.

As some may know, the House Committee on Ways and Means had one day of hearings last week. That obviously was not acceptable. We think the Democrats feel, and I feel very strongly, that we should have about a month worth of hearings and debate on something so important as Medicare. As a result, we have decided to have alternative hearings, and today was the second day of those alternative hearings out on the lawn in front of the Capitol where we heard from people from various parts of the community about the problems with the Republican leadership's proposal to change Medicare and take some \$270 billion in cuts in Medicare in order to fund tax cuts primarily for the rich.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say, I was very pleased today, because I have

noticed now that not only on Medicare, but also on Medicaid, the health care program for poor people, that this is no longer a partisan issue in my home State of New Jersey. Increasingly, Republican legislators have come out, both on the State and the Federal level, and criticized their own party for what is happening to Medicare and Medicaid. On the Medicare program for the seniors, today, or I guess it was yesterday, in Ocean County, which is the county that I used to represent, three State legislators, including Senator Connors and also Assemblyman Moran, both of whom have been in the State legislature for a long time, came out and had a press conference, sent a letter to Senator DOLE and to Speaker GINGRICH saying that they should scrap the Medicare proposal as it is, said that it was not fair to take away the money from Medicare to the tune of \$270 billion and use it to finance a tax cut for wealthy Americans.

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They asked the Speaker and Senator DOLE to simply throw the thing away. They pointed out, which I thought was very significant, that the proposal by Speaker GINGRICH to double the Medicare Part B premium for doctor bills over the next 7 years was totally unacceptable and that seniors in their part of New Jersey, in Ocean County, would not be able to pay that Part B premium.

This is something that myself and other Democrats have been complaining about now for several weeks but now we are also seeing Republicans in New Jersey coming out very strongly against these proposals.

One of the worst things that happened, not only with regard to Medicare but also with regard to Medicaid is that my own committee, the Committee on Commerce, last Friday reported out the Medicaid bill that essentially the Republican leadership had put together. I have rarely seen such a travesty committed against the American people, particularly poor people, particularly elderly people.

The New York Times in an editorial today called it a cruel revision of Medicaid. They said, "Congress shows no signs of slowing its assault on the social safety net stitched together over 6 decades. The House Commerce Committee tore another hole in the net on Friday by eliminating the Federal guarantee of Medicaid insurance for millions of poor families. At the same time it voted to slash Federal Medicaid spending, virtually forcing States to kick millions of poor children out of the program."

Let me tell just briefly some of the things that the Committee on Commerce did on Friday by a strictly partisan vote, all the Republicans voting for it and most except I think for one Democrat voting against it. First of all they eliminated all standards for nursing homes. They are giving money under Medicaid to the States for the

Medicaid program which primarily pays for nursing home care in this country and they are eliminating all nursing home standards. Basically unless the State steps in, the nursing homes can do whatever they want.

The other thing they did was to eliminate any protection for seniors, the spouse who stays back at home when the other spouse goes to a nursing home. Right now if your spouse has to go to a nursing home and pay for it by Medicaid, you can keep your home, you can keep your car, you can keep something like \$14,000 in assets. That is gone.

The assault on senior citizens both with the changes in Medicare and Medicaid continues. It is very unfortunate. I think it is incumbent upon us to continue to speak out against it.

REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP ON MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SALMON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. FOX] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FOX of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise to underscore the importance of the Republican leadership in being at the forefront to help senior citizens here in the United States.

We have looked to the leadership of this House, the Republicans, who in a bipartisan fashion this year rolled back the unfair tax that is on our Social Security recipients that was placed there in 1993. As well, under that same leadership, in a bipartisan vote but led by Republicans, the seniors, who have been capped at \$11,280 for income for those under 70 without having deductions from their Social Security allotment, in fact now can earn under our new legislation up to \$30,000 a year without any deductions from Social Security payments.

This is what many senior groups have asked for and we have responded by in fact approving such legislation in this House.

Now let us look to the major problem that we need to face to make sure that Medicare is in fact here not only for the seniors of today but for the seniors of tomorrow. We look to the fact that Republicans and Democrats in the House are looking to preserve, protect and hopefully strengthen Medicare.

Just look to the President's trustees, Mr. Speaker, back here in the spring of the year, when they determined, and that is the Secretary of Treasury Rubin, Secretary of Health Shalala and the Secretary of Labor Reich, they all said that by the year 2002 if we do nothing, Medicare goes bankrupt. No representative in this House or in the Senate could responsibly go home after this session and say we did nothing to preserve, protect or strengthen Medicare.

Therefore, we need to look to alternatives of what to do. How do we strengthen this system that has pro-

vided valuable health care services to our seniors the last 30 years?

We look at health care costs in the country today, Mr. Speaker. Four percent is the average health care cost increase that we are having. But Medicare has gone up 10 or 11 percent a year. If you just look to the fact that fraud, abuse and waste is taking \$30 billion a year, that has been documented by every important Government agency, including the GAO, you will find that that is a large part of how we can solve the Medicare crisis.

I had a Medicare preservation task force meet throughout my district this summer, a bipartisan group, asked seniors, those who are subscribers, insurance companies, they talked to people who are involved in the health care field and said, "What can we do to change it?" They came up with some solutions which I have passed on to legislative leaders of the House and we hope that as a result of those task force recommendations, Mr. Speaker, we will have some fundamental changes.

One of the changes they want to see is first, of course, the fraud, abuse, and waste eliminated but also the 12-percent cost we put toward paperwork—paperwork, Mr. Speaker—instead of health care. We have to reduce that. We also had from our task force recommendations that beyond having the fee-for-service as an option for our seniors, the continued fee-for-service, also talking about the possibility of a managed care option, with more services to seniors that they are not now getting, possibly dentures or eye care or pharmaceuticals included. Also talking about Medisave accounts, where you get \$4,800 a year as you do now, of course, up to \$6,700 by the year 2002, but whatever funds you would not use in your visits to the doctor, et cetera, will be rolled over, you keep the money or rolled over to the following year. Also our task force called for the Inspector General to actually implement some of the reforms from the HHS Inspector General which call for not paying those subscribers, not paying those who provide the health care service substandard care, that we make sure we get reimbursement to the system.

I am also working with the gentleman from New Mexico [Mr. SCHIFF] and the gentleman from Connecticut [Mr. SHAYS] on legislation to speed up the enforcement, investigation and prosecution of those who would commit the fraud, abuse and waste.

I think that we can see, Mr. Speaker, that by working together in a bipartisan fashion, we can not only make sure that we have a health care system under Medicare for our seniors that is strong and is preserved for this generation of seniors but for the next generation of seniors to whom we also owe a responsibility.

REPUBLICANS WILL GET MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida [Ms. BROWN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the 104th Congress came here with a mission: to balance the budget. I don't think there are many who would disagree that balancing the budget is a top priority. But I cannot, in good faith, balance the budget on the backs of the poor women, children, the elderly, and the disabled—people who need help the most. It is wrong for this Congress to abandon Americans in need.

Mr. Speaker, Webster's Dictionary defines the verb to "cut" as to hit sharply, to constrict, to reduce, to lessen, to hurt.

I understand that the Republican leadership is unhappy about us using the word "cut" to describe the Republicans' revolting and offensive Medicare plan. OK, fine, Maybe cut is not quite the right word. Well how about gut? According to Webster's, to gut is to demolish, to destroy. How do you like the word gut? The fact is that Republicans want to destroy Medicare's security and leave our seniors stranded to fend for themselves. Perhaps gut is a more appropriate word!

Mr. Speaker, during the August recess, I held 13 town meetings and met with 3,000 of my constituents. My constituents told me that they are outraged about the Republicans' reverse Robin Hood tactics—taking Medicare benefits from seniors in order to pay for a tax break for the wealthy.

The Republicans are trying to pull the wool over the eyes of 37 million of our Nation's seniors. Many of these folks will be forced to give up their doctors, premiums will rise, as will deductibles and copayments. For many of our Nation's low-income seniors, these cuts will be devastating. A thousand dollars extra per year is not small change.

Republican call it a cut in the growth of spending. I call a sneaky attempt to fool seniors. They say they are offering seniors choices. The truth is that seniors will pay more and get less. They call it progress. I call it a good old-fashioned bait and switch.

You know, the Republican Medicare plan reminds me of an old saying: you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time. The American people will not be fooled by this game being played with the health care of the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, we are sent here to Congress to be a protector of the people. Thirty years ago, when President Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare into law, Congress made a social contract with the seniors of our Nation. Well, guess who opposed Medicare in 1965? The Republicans. Even before that, during the Eisenhower and Truman administrations, the Republicans opposed passing Medicare. That's why it's no surprise