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So I thank the gentleman for inviting me to go along on the delegation. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and I regret that I have to leave now.

Mr. WICKER. I thank the gentleman for his contribution to this special order. I know that the other four members of the delegation had intended to participate in this, and perhaps in the few moments remaining, we will still get their participation.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Minnesota mentioned that he had actually changed his mind fundamentally on the issue of whether our troops should be there. I think when Americans remember that instability in this area, instability in Europe and particularly in Central Europe, has drawn our Nation into two world wars in this century, then we need to be very, very cautious about any action that we might take at this point to cause hostilities to resume there.

We know that in another area of the former Yugoslavia, the Kosovo region, there is a very dangerous situation going on there. Anything that we might do now in a precipitate way I think might bring our allies into a widened conflict, and then the question would be, what does the United States do now that NATO allies are fighting?

The gentleman from Minnesota mentioned a couple of things that I want to follow up on before I get to our final two observations and conclusions. First of all, he mentioned mistakes that the administration had made, and certainly no one is perfect. But I would certainly concur that the administration has not adequately made the case to the American people about why we are doing what we are doing in the Balkans.

I think it was a mistake, Mr. Speaker, for the administration to set artificial timetables. The President may have felt that he had to do this in order to prevent public opinion from stopping the deployment of these troops in late 1995, but I think the establishment of artificial timetables, a year and then we will be out, that sort of talk only gave encouragement to the forces over there who wanted to resume the conflict, who want to resume the ultranationalism that led to this horrible war. So I think that was a mistake.

I am glad that the administration is being more realistic about that now and saying, we want our troops to come home, certainly we want the Bosnian people and people in the Balkans to handle this situation, but we do not believe a timetable is the right way to go. We think specific goals and benchmarks of achievement are better.

It is also regrettable, Mr. Speaker, that the administration has refused to budget honestly for the Bosnian deployment. We have had our troops there since 1995. It has been very expensive, as we mentioned, \$2 billion to \$3 billion.

The administration fully intends to keep troops there, and I support keeping the troops there, during the entirety of the remainder of this fiscal year and through fiscal year 1999. But the administration has refused to budget for this Bosnian operation.

I do not believe that is honesty in budgeting. I think the administration should admit what they expect we will spend, because certainly it will be expensive, and the administration should submit a budget in the regular budget process so we can adequately plan our budget.

Certainly I want to reiterate the feeling that we should not be taking this peacekeeping money from the other very important national defense needs that we have, separate and apart from our being in there with the stabilization force.

Mr. Speaker, in the few moments that I have remaining, let me simply mention the last two items of our observations and conclusions. That would be items 6 and 7.

Item 6, and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) spoke about this, the importance of the September, 1998, elections.

"The September, 1998, Bosnian elections will be a watershed in determining whether Bosnia moves forward or backward. Until then, we believe the United States should actively continue to support the process of Dayton implementation. Given the effort already expended, it would be foolish to change our political, diplomatic, or military policy in Bosnia before the September elections have taken place.

"However, we do not believe that the United States' commitment can be open-ended. We do not believe it can be open-ended. Stabilization forces will provide important support to the Office of the High Representative in its efforts to create a climate for a fair election. Notwithstanding our observations of the role in peace being played by U.S. troops, we are concerned about the annual exercise of funding our peacekeeping operations in Bosnia by means of supplemental appropriations."

This is what I was alluding to earlier, Mr. Speaker.

"We encourage the administration to pursue means by which such contingencies can, at least to some degree, be funded, other than at the cost of other important national priorities."

Finally, conclusion and observation number 7, "We are convinced that the United States has a vital interest in the stability of Central Europe."

I might interject here, Mr. Speaker, that Sarajevo in Bosnia was the flashpoint for the start of World War I with the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. As a matter of fact, when we were meeting in Sarajevo with Lieutenant General David Benton, he pointed out that we were meeting in the very room, Mr. Speaker, where the Archduke slept his last night.

Also, in World War II, it was in Bosnia where we saw the first instance of the most heinous forms of ethnic cleansing. The subsequent disintegration and division among ethnic groups was in part a source of the Communist influence which later came into that region.

I continue with conclusion number 7, Mr. Speaker. I quote:

The United States is the undisputed leader of the free world. This role carries with it responsibilities, and among these is participating in efforts to ensure Europe's stability. However, it is our desire that the future of Bosnia ultimately be determined by the Bosnian people themselves.

This statement is signed by the gentleman from Mississippi (ROGER WICKER), the gentleman from Georgia (SAXBY CHAMBLISS), the gentleman from South Carolina (LINDSEY GRAHAM), the gentleman from Minnesota (GIL GUTKNECHT), the gentleman from Wisconsin (RON KIND), and the gentleman from Ohio (DENNIS KUCINICH), persons that I am delighted to have gone to Bosnia with on this congressional delegation trip, and to have been associated with. I think all five of these gentlemen that I went to Bosnia with represented the Congress in an able fashion and represented the United States, and came back with some valuable, valuable information.

In conclusion, let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that our visit to the Balkans, to Bosnia, to the troops there, and to the American personnel on the ground, made me proud to be an American, proud of the role that the United States of America is playing in preventing another world war, perhaps, or at the very least, another deadly conflict.

I am proud of our military. I am proud of the fact that our friends in Europe, in spite of the many differences we may have on certain issues, turned to the United States for help in stabilizing this region, and preventing a resumption of hostility.

I would say that the six of us all concluded that no matter what we initially thought about the United States' deployment in this area, we feel that we cannot in good conscience turn our back on the effort that we have already expended, and I commend the report to the reading of our fellow Members of Congress, Mr. Speaker. They will be receiving it in the form of a Dear Colleague letter in the next day or two.

MEDICARE EXPANSION FOR AMERICANS AGE 55 TO 65

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DICKEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to mention today how important it is for this Congress and this House to address the issue of Medicare expansion with regard to Americans age 55 to 65.

The President in his State of the Union Address, and just this past Tuesday, just yesterday, had a press conference where he discussed the need to move quickly on the issue of Medicare expansion for what we call the near elderly, those between 55 and 65. I believe it is crucial for us to address this issue. The Democrats are making it one of their priorities for this Congress. So far the Republican leadership has refused to acknowledge the need for such legislation, or to even suggest that it be moved in committee and moved out to the floor of the House of Representatives.

Today, for a variety of reasons, more and more Americans are losing their employment-based health insurance before they become eligible for Medicare at age 65.

Some of these Americans lose their health coverage because their older spouse becomes eligible for Medicare and retires, ending their work-based coverage. Others lose their coverage because of downsizing or layoffs. Still others lose their insurance when their employers unexpectedly drop their retirement health care plans.

These people worked hard, usually in most cases for a lifetime, supporting their families and contributing to society. Now, just when they need it most, they lose their coverage and are unattractive to health insurers, who demand high premiums or simply deny coverage outright.

I am getting more and more of my constituents who come into my office in New Jersey and complain about the fact that they cannot get access to affordable health care when they are in this age bracket, from 55 to 65. They find it very difficult in this age group to get coverage outside of the workplace. Many are often left with no alternative but to buy into the individual insurance market, where premiums can exceed \$1,000 per month for a person with a preexisting condition. For those with serious health problems, they may not be able to find insurance at all, at any price.

What the President has proposed, and what the Democrats in the Congress are suggesting be done and be moved, is a bill that presents three options to this age group to obtain health insurance.

One, individuals 62 to 65 years old with no access to health insurance may buy into Medicare by paying a base premium now and a deferred premium during their post-65 Medicare enrollment.

Individuals in the second category, from 55 to 62, who have been laid off and have no access to health insurance, as well as their spouse, may buy into Medicare by paying a monthly premium of about \$400.

Retirees, and this is the third category, aged 65 or older whose employer-sponsored coverage is terminated may buy into their employer's health insurance for active workers at 125 percent of the group rate.

So we are talking about three categories of people in this age bracket who face different problems. But the main thing, Mr. Speaker, is the Democrats understand that Americans in this age group have difficulty getting health insurance at one of the most vulnerable times in their lives.

We want to help these people out. They have greater risks of health problems, with twice the risk of heart disease, strokes, and cancer as people whose ages are in the 10 years from 45 to 54 or below, but they are having a very hard time obtaining affordable health insurance for themselves and their spouse. This is a problem that is growing. It is getting to crisis proportions. It will only grow as retiree health coverage is reduced and as the baby boom generation ages.

What we are trying to do here is address a health concern without putting any additional financial burden on the Medicare program. I think this is a very good piece of legislation. The Republican leadership has not addressed it, but they should address it.

One issue that also comes up, and I have actually suggested it, is that we find some way to provide some financial assistance to the near elderly who will have a problem buying into the Medicare system because of the cost of the monthly premium.

I have been working on legislation that would provide economic assistance for those age 62 to 64 who choose to buy into the Medicare program, and for those age 55 to 64 who have been laid off or displaced.

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There may be some way to provide some sort of subsidy so that those who cannot afford the full cost of the Medicare premium on a sliding scale, based on their affordability, would be able to get some sort of subsidy so that they could successfully buy into this program. With or without that type of subsidy, though, this is a good program. It is something that needs to be addressed.

Like the issue of managed care reform or like the issue of kids' health care that was addressed in the last Congress, I hope that, as the Democrats keep pushing for this, the Republican leadership will eventually wake up and allow this type of legislation to be taken up so that those in that 55 to 65 category can buy into Medicare, and we can see Medicare expanded in a way that is both fiscally responsible, but also addresses a growing health care concern.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN (at the request of Mr. GEPHARDT) for today and Thursday, on account of attending a funeral.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legis-

lative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. KUCINICH) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. FILNER, for 5 minutes, today.
 Ms. NORTON, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mrs. TAUSCHER, for 5 minutes, today.
 Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.
 Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD, for 5 minutes, today.
 Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. SHERMAN, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. UNDERWOOD, for 5 minutes, today.
 Ms. DELAUNOY, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mrs. MALONEY of New York, for 5 minutes, today.
 Ms. SLAUGHTER, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. KLINK, for 5 minutes, today.

The following Members (at the request of Mr. KINGSTON) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:

Mr. DIAZ-BALART, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. MICA, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland, for 5 minutes, today.

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

By unanimous consent, permission to revise and extend remarks was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. KUCINICH) and to include extraneous matter:)

Mr. KIND.
 Mr. KANJORSKI.
 Mr. BONIOR.
 Mr. MCGOVERN.
 Mr. TOWNS.
 Mr. CLAY.
 Mr. PASCARELL.
 Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas.
 Mr. HAMILTON.
 (The following Members (at the request of Mr. KINGSTON) and to include extraneous matter:)

Mr. RADANOVICH.
 Mr. ROGERS.
 Mr. BEREUTER.
 Mr. TALENT.
 Mr. WALSH.
 Mr. LUCAS.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. CAMPBELL) and to include extraneous matter:)

Mr. SHAW.
 Mr. STUMP.
 Mr. GORDON.
 Mr. PACKARD.
 Mr. BLUNT.
 Mr. MILLER of California.
 Mr. LUTHER.
 Mrs. MEEK of Florida.
 Mr. GALLEGLY.
 Mr. YOUNG of Florida.
 Mr. LAZIO of New York.
 Mr. CRANE.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. CAMPBELL. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 01 minutes