The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BENTSEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BENTSEN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CHANGES IN MEDICARE DECIMATE KANSAS HOME HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to address an issue of critical importance to people of Kansas and really the entire country. Several provisions buried in last year's Medicare bill are decimating home health care providers in Kansas and jeopardizing access to critical health care services to the sick and elderly in rural America.

Last year, in the effort to reduce spending, Congress made three crippling changes to Medicare reimbursement rates and regulations for home health care providers. First, the new interim payment system has slashed reimbursements to all agencies and is particularly discriminatory to agencies who have historically been the lowest cost, most efficient providers.

Second, the unrealistic requirements that all agencies, regardless of size, obtain $50,000 surety bond has been devastating. These bonds are expensive for many agencies and generally unavailable in most parts of the country. Even the Small Business Administration has acknowledged that there are great difficulties that many small agencies are experiencing in obtaining these bonds.

Finally, the loss of venipuncture reimbursement has added to the financial difficulties resulting in the closure of many agencies across the country, including Kansas. In our efforts to curtail fraud and wasteful spending, Congress went too far. Surely Congress did not intend to close down reputable and efficient providers of home health care services.

In rural Kansas, health care is not just a quality of life issue. It is a matter of survival. A home health care agency in a rural community is often the sole provider of services, the critical link between hospitals and independent personal recovery. These agencies give seniors the opportunity to recover in their own homes with their own families and save the Medicare program costly hospital or nursing home stays following each illness or injury. Rural providers and their patients are especially hurt by cuts in payments due to the high cost of providing these services in a rural setting. These cuts threaten to leave seniors without adequate care and without independence of home care.

I wholeheartedly support the goal of reforming Medicare. Unfortunately, the budget agreement penalized the very efficiency that Congress should be encouraging. Last year I was one of only a handful of Members to vote against the Medicare budget provisions, not because I opposed meaningful reforms in the Medicare program, but because, among other reasons, I opposed a payment system which rewarded waste and punished efficiency.

I urge my colleagues in the House to join me in calling for an immediate review of the home health care provisions in the Balanced Budget Act and to take action necessary to remedy this crisis. Yesterday legislation was introduced in the Senate to limit the surety bond requirements to new agencies while strengthening protection and oversight for fraud, waste and abuse, and legislation has been introduced in both Houses to modify the interim payment system and provide needed relief for home health care providers.

Mr. Speaker, these are the real reforms that the Medicare home health care program desperately needs. I urge my colleagues to reconsider this issue.

□ 2310

CHAIRMAN BURTON APOLOGIZES FOR HANDLING OF HUBBELL TAPES BUT REFUSES TO ADMIT ERROR

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GILCHREST). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, today we have learned that the Chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight has fired his chief investigator and apologized to his fellow Republicans for any embarrassment caused by his actions in releasing distorted summaries of telephone conversations between Mr. Hubbell and his wife.

If the chairman now recognizes that the actions taken by his committee were wrong, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) also owes an apology to Mr. and Mrs. Hubbell as well as the President and the First Lady. The release of those summaries as well as the tapes themselves represents something that may be truly unprecedented in the House of Representatives: the elevation of partisanship over the sanctity of the privacy of conversations between a husband and wife.

This is such a profound affront to most people's sensibilities and the values that we hold dear that it raises new questions about whether the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) can or ought to continue to lead that committee's investigation into alleged campaign finance violations.

Chairman BURTON's continuing release of the private telephone conversations of Mr. Hubbell, including conversations with his wife and his attorney, appear to represent a serious abuse of government power intended to humiliate Mr. Hubbell because of his prior association with the Clinton administration.

Have we really reached the point where we think it is appropriate to publicly broadcast intimate conversations, most of which have nothing to do with the allegations of campaign finance violations, between a man and his wife? If we are concerned about family values, Congress should support the privacy of marital relationships, not make them public.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. KANJORSKI. I would say to the gentleman from Michigan, we know that in prior Congresses you had the occasion to chair this committee of the House. Can you tell us from your personal experience of having served in the Congress more than 30 years any recollection on your part of the conduct of this particular chairman of this committee in the investigation of such a serious matter?

Mr. CONYERS. Well, we do not have enough time to discuss the conduct of the chairman of the committee, but I can tell you that never in any committee can I recall to the Members of the body that we went into privacy and violated the spirit of privacy laws in the way that they have been done now. And there was a curious coincidence between the release of information from the special prosecutor and the release of these tapes. The chairman, a friend, his own chief counsel, advised him not to release the tapes, but he did so anyway. The Speaker of the House of Representatives publicly stated that a third party should screen the tapes for privacy issues before further releases were made. What did the committee do? It continued to release more tapes.

So almost daily, the impression continues to grow that the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) or his committee is simply out of control. If the chairman's goal is simply to get at the truth, then there was no need to doctor the tapes.

Considering all of this, along with the chairman's recent public statement that he was after, quote-unquote, the President, President Clinton, how can the important investigative work of the committee lead to any findings that will be accepted as legitimate by the public?

I would appeal to the higher instincts of the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) to apologize to the Hubbells and to the President and to the First Lady.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION AMENDMENTS OF 1998

The SPEAKER pro tempore. 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 tonight to discuss the very important legislation which was just

adopted in the House, speaking of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 which we passed this evening. This will reverse the current trend where it has been more difficult for many students to get into college because of financial reasons, and this is because college will be more affordable under our new amendments. It will simplify the student aid system and improve academic quality. In doing so, our bill enhances the freedom of Americans to live the American dream, rewards Americans who are willing to take responsibility for themselves in the future and restores accountability to the Nation's higher education programs.

Higher education amendments make college more affordable by rescuing the student loan program and, in turn, providing students with the lowest interest rate in 17 years. Specifically, this provision ensures that private banks stay in the student loan program. Without it the student loan program would eventually collapse and college students would be left without the borrowing power which they need to finance their education.

The higher ed bill makes college more affordable for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It expands the Pell grant program which provides higher education vouchers for needy students and improves campus-based aid programs like the supplemental education opportunity grants, work-study and the Perkins loans, and strengthens international and graduate education.

Mr. Speaker, it also brings much needed reforms to the TRIO program to help disadvantaged children prepare for college while still in their teens. Specifically the bill increases the maximum allowable Pell grant for students from the current 3,000 to $4,500 per student for academic year 1999, and the grants gradually increase to 5,300 in the year 2003 to 2004.

Furthermore, the bill acknowledges sacrifices rendered by making college more affordable for those who serve in the U.S. Armed forces. Specifically it exempts veterans' benefits from being counted against students when they apply for financial aid.

This legislation holds colleges and universities accountable for tuition increases. Under the bill, colleges and universities are required to develop clear standards for reporting college costs and prices for both undergraduate and graduate education.

It also simplifies the student aid system. The Higher Education Amendments of 1998, which we just voted upon, offers students a way out by making the student aid process more user-friendly, incorporating sales management principles into student aid programs, and cutting red tape and bureaucracy.

One of the most important parts of this bill, Mr. Speaker, was the Foley amendment which requires that crime statistics be available to those who apply to colleges. I have in my own district a heroine, Connie Cleary, who has been working for many years to make sure that colleges report such security information. Her daughter was tragically murdered on a college campus. She and her husband have dedicated their lives to making sure that every college parent and student knows exactly what the security situation is at each university, so that together we can make our campuses safer and to make sure that individuals who attend schools have every piece of knowledge they should know about the campus in making an informed choice.

This bill is a positive bill. I believe it is going to help more students attend college and be able to financially afford to achieve their dream and then go on to get the job which best suits the academic challenges they have met.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. HINCHEY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. CLAYTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

□ 2320

FAULTY PROCEDURES OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM AND OVERSIGHT

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

Mr. KANJORSKI. Mr. Speaker, I know the hour is late. It is a pleasure to follow my good friend from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS), the former chairman of the House Operations Committee, now the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight of the House of Representatives.

On the same issue that the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) recently addressed the House on, I would just like to spell out some of my thoughts in regards to the exercise of the authority of the committee and the chairing of the committee, particularly in the last several months.

Mr. Speaker, the House of Representatives, in passing the resolution directing the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight to examine the election practices in the presidential and congressional elections of 1996, invested in the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight a very unusual power and instruction. I dare say, although this was a political issue from the standpoint it involved political campaigns and supposedly both parties that were engaged in the campaign of 1996, my observations were that both on the majority and the minority side, originally there was some expression of intent to do a serious, credible investigation and examination; not a persecution or a politically motivated investigation, but something that would give insight to the Members of this House and to the American people of a very serious problem, and that problem is the prostitution of the American political system and campaigns, which is fast overwhelming this Nation as experienced in 1996.

As we met to organize and to identify our mission, it seemed that very early on many of us on the minority side of the committee were fast realizing that there was an extraordinary power, the power of subpoena that was going to be vested in the Chairman without the need for clearing a subpoena through the ranking member or to going to the full committee that would normally have some input in the exercise of the issuance of a subpoena. I thought that was strange, and to my own mind and to others I remarked at the time that as a result of this unusual power being vested in the chairman, he would become the most powerful American citizen in the United States. No other individual in the United States could, by merely signing a subpoena, command the presence, the records, the examination of all of the personal papers of any American citizen.

We cautioned the chairman that it may be wise to carry on prior practices, both of the Committee of Oversight and Investigation, and the experiences of the Watergate committee, the Thompson committee in the Senate, and that was that when an individual is going to be issued a subpoena, it should come to the full committee to be disclosed, or at least to the ranking member so that a discussion can be had; and when agreement was reached, the subpoena would issue. If there was disagreement, it would come to the full committee and the full committee would cast a vote with the majority of the committee controlling the outcome as to whether the subpoena should issue.

Instead of doing that, the chairman received, without limitation, by vote of the majority of the committee, that he in his own right, without consultation and without consent from the committee, and without contest by the rest of the committee, could issue at will subpoenas to many citizens in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I think nearly 1,000 such subpoenas were issued. Some of them were so grossly and improperly issued that because the surname of the individual who was named in the subpoena was of Chinese American origin, there was a professor at the University of Georgetown that had his bank records seized, even though he had nothing to do with the campaign and was, in fact, an entirely different person. We called that very strongly to