

Pueblo. Her devotion helped enable many families to invest their money and helped to make their dreams come true. I would like to applaud her for her years of dedication and hard work. Her time and dedication have proved an invaluable addition to the company. I wish Zelma the best of luck in her future endeavors—I hope she will enjoy her well-deserved retirement!

MEDICARE MODERNIZATION AND
PRESCRIPTION DRUG ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 27, 2002

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I proposed the Republican prescription drug bill. And not only the bill, but the process by which we considered it.

Since being elected to Congress in 1998, not a day has gone by without my hearing from a senior who is struggling to pay for prescription drugs.

I've told the story of the woman from Westminster, CO who has to visit the food bank once a week so that she can afford her prescription drugs.

I've told the story of another woman who plays her own version of the lottery. She puts all of her bills in a fish bowl, draws one bill, and the one she draws is the one she puts off paying so that she can buy the drugs her doctor tells her she has to take.

And I've told the story of Juanita Johns, a constituent who kept the thermostat in her home at 60 degrees so she could pay her drug bills. That is until she sold her house and moved in with her son in order to afford her medicines. Juanita is not with us anymore.

Unfortunately, these women are not alone. Over one-third of Medicare beneficiaries have no drug coverage. Medicare does not cover

outpatient prescription drug costs. Many seniors turn to supplemental plans for drug coverage, but these plans often are expensive and have high deductibles or low benefits.

No senior should be faced with the choice of buying food, paying the electric bill or buying critical life saving medicines.

We have an obligation to our Nation's seniors to provide them with the lifesaving treatments they need and deserve.

Last month, we had the opportunity to do something about it. But the Republican leadership insisted on pushing through a proposal that subsidizes insurance companies and drug companies instead of helping seniors. Their bill does nothing to guarantee coverage for seniors. It has a gap in coverage that will leave Medicare beneficiaries 100% financially liable for thousands of dollars in drug costs, covers only 6% of Medicare beneficiaries, and does nothing to lower the price of prescription drugs. Instead, their bill gives \$310 billion to insurance companies to encourage them to offer stand-alone prescription drug plans, something that the insurance companies themselves say will not work.

If this bill becomes law, and if past is prologue, we will have insurance companies knocking on our door in the not too distant future telling us that they don't have enough money to provide these plans, and that they need more. It's just like what is happening with Medicare+Choice. Several insurance companies promised seniors affordable health care, took their premiums and then dumped them a year later. And now many seniors are scrambling to find a new doctor.

Now, I support the increase in payments for providers, which are included in the Republican bill. As a matter of fact, I am cosponsoring legislation to increase physician payments and to change the formula upon which those payments are based. I support increased payments to our Nation's hospitals, and I've joined with several of my colleagues asking the leadership of this body to address Medicare HMO payment issues. But in a cynical political move, the authors of this bill at-

tached these provider payments to their prescription drug bill to force us to vote against them. So I am going on the record today to say that my vote against this bill should not be construed as a vote against provider payments.

And my vote against this bill should not be construed as a vote against prescription drugs for seniors. I support the Democratic plan, which is a defined benefit under Medicare. It has a guaranteed premium, a guaranteed copayment, guaranteed coverage, and is available to all those seniors who need it. It doesn't have any gaps in coverage, and it has no gimmicks. That's what our seniors deserve.

But the Republican leadership wouldn't even let us bring our bill to the floor for debate. They wouldn't even let us offer amendments to their bill. Why not? If it was so bad, they could have just voted it down. But they knew that our plan was better and if it were put up against the Republican plan, it would have prevailed. Instead, they took a "my way or the highway" approach.

On the day of the vote, many members took to the floor of the House to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. ". . . one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Where is the indivisibility? Where is the liberty in this rule? Where is the justice in this rule? In this debate? In this bill? We should set a better example for other governments around the world. This is not the way democracy works.

Mr. Speaker, the great civil rights worker Fannie Lou Hamer once said, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." So am I, and so are the millions of seniors who can't afford the drugs their doctors tell them they have to take. The number of seniors in this Nation will double over the next twenty years, and at that time, their voices and actions will be stronger than the insurance companies and the drug manufacturers. I just hope we don't have to wait that long.

I could not support the rule or the bill.