

In the same vein, we are mindful of the large number of veterans employed by the Postal Service. Our promises and commitment to these veterans must not be forgotten or diminished. In their military service, and in their postal service, these veterans have served their country. It is necessary and appropriate that we continue to recognize their sacrifices by providing them preferential employment opportunities in government positions, including positions in the Postal Service.

Thank you for your careful consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS,
Chair, CBC.
DANNY K. DAVIS,
Ranking Member, Special
Committee on
Postal Services.

INTRODUCTION OF THE MEDICARE Rx DRUG BENEFIT AND DIS- COUNT ACT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 11, 2003

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, today, House Democrats answer the public's call for a real Medicare prescription drug benefit.

The Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit and Discount Act is an entitlement that will guarantee affordable, comprehensive prescription drug coverage to all senior citizens and individuals with disabilities who are on Medicare.

The benefit in this legislation is simple. It has no gaps, and no gimmicks. Beneficiaries will pay a \$25 monthly premium, have a \$100 per year deductible, and pay 20 percent co-insurance up to a \$2000 out-of-pocket limit. After a beneficiary spends \$2000, Medicare pays for all other needed prescription drugs. Under this legislation, a beneficiary will never pay more than \$2000 for prescription drugs in a year, and most beneficiaries will pay far less.

This legislation provides additional assistance to those with lower incomes. Beneficiaries whose incomes are under 150 percent of poverty will pay no premiums and no cost-sharing. Those with incomes between 150–175 percent of poverty will receive premium subsidies on a sliding scale basis and pay no cost-sharing. Unlike the House-passed Republican bill from last year, there is no hidden hatchet to deny benefits to low-income seniors who have modest assets.

These Medicare benefits will be guaranteed for everyone on Medicare, regardless of where they live and regardless of whether they are in the traditional Medicare program or a private plan. No senior will be forced to leave Medicare for a private plan in order to receive meaningful prescription drug coverage.

This legislation also tackles one of the biggest problems facing seniors, the uninsured, and all Americans: astronomical prescription drug prices. This bill will reduce Medicare prescription drug costs by using the market clout of 40 million Medicare beneficiaries to negotiate lower prices. It will also reduce prescription drug costs for all Americans by closing loopholes in current law that allow pharmaceutical companies to game the patent system and prevent competition from equally effective, but lower cost, generic drugs.

The Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit and Discount Act will guarantee the choices that matter. Under our plan, Medicare will pay toward the cost of every prescription drug, not just those for which a private insurance company cut a special deal with a drug maker. Seniors will be covered for any drug their doctor prescribes. And, under our plan, every pharmacy that is willing to play by the rules will be welcome to participate. Seniors will be able to go to the pharmacy of their choice.

And, importantly, unlike the President's plan and the Congressional Republicans' plan, our plan will never force elderly or disabled Americans to give up traditional Medicare in order to get a prescription drug benefit. Beneficiaries will be free to choose between the traditional Medicare program and private plans. But it will be a real choice, not coerced through the lure of a more generous prescription drug benefit.

The prescription drug coverage in the Democratic bill will seem just like any other Medicare benefit, because it is a Medicare benefit.

Don't be fooled by Republican rhetoric. They like to talk about choices, but in the end their proposals all boll down to one choice for seniors—choose either the doctor you know and trust or the medicines you know you need. This is not a choice that anyone should have to make.

The Administration claims to offer seniors the same choices that Members of Congress and federal employees get through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). Again, this is nothing more than hyperbole. Almost all Members of Congress, and most federal employees, are in the Blue Cross Standard Option plan in FEHBP. That plan offers a drug benefit with no deductible, a 25 percent copayment, and a \$4000 cap on all medical spending per year. No Republican has come forth with a comparable Medicare prescription drug benefit. Our bill does just that.

The Republicans' goal is simple: they are using the promise of a prescription drug benefit to attempt to privatize Medicare. No matter how you measure it, beneficiaries will pay more and get less under the Republican plan. At the same time, they are doling out hundreds of billions of dollars in federal tax dollar giveaways to their friends in the insurance and pharmaceutical industries.

Our legislation will not be cheap. But none of us question the cost of covering doctor visits and hospital stays under Medicare today. I would argue that prescription drug coverage is as essential to good health care in the 21st century as physician and hospital care was in the 20th century when Medicare was created.

The President has committed \$400 billion to a Medicare drug benefit and so-called Medicare reform. On top of that, he's committed \$726 billion to an economic stimulus plan that includes dividend cuts and speeding up tax breaks for the very richest among us. No one believes that this tax cut will provide real economic stimulus. If he would simply reduce its size, we could rededicate those funds to improving Medicare. That is a much more important priority for our nation than more tax cuts for those who need them least.

Unfortunately, it is not the goal of Republicans to create an affordable, meaningful prescription drug benefit in Medicare that works for all our Medicare beneficiaries of today and tomorrow. Instead, their prescription drug pro-

posals are designed simply to provide political cover for the President and Republican Members of Congress—and to allow them to privatize Medicare so that the federal government's expenses are protected rather than protecting the expenses of seniors and people with disabilities.

Our bill meets the needs of the 40 million Americans who depend on Medicare. That's why the leading beneficiary organizations support this legislation. This is the drug benefit America's seniors and people with disabilities need and deserve. I urge my colleagues to join us in support of a real Medicare drug benefit by pushing for passage of the Medicare Rx Drug Benefit and Discount Act this year.

IN OBSERVANCE OF TIBETAN UPRISING DAY

HON. NANCY PELOSI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 11, 2003

Ms. PELOSI. Ms. Speaker, I rise in honor of Tibetan Uprising Day. Yesterday, Human Rights Watch reported that two Tibetan businessmen have been detained by Chinese authorities, apparently on suspicion of leaking information on the torture and trial of other Tibetan activists. It was an important reminder of the continued need to speak out against human rights abuses by the Chinese government. The following is my statement in observance of Tibetan Uprising Day that was read yesterday in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco:

Thank you to Bay Area Friends of Tibet and other Bay Area Tibet Support Groups for organizing this special observance of Tibetan Uprising Day. I am proud to represent a district where protecting human rights is a top priority.

Today we honor the courage and determination of those who stood against the Chinese Government's brutal oppression of the Tibetan People during the Lhasa Uprising 44 years ago. We also pay tribute to the thousands of Tibetans who have sacrificed and died opposing Chinese occupation, as well as all Tibetans who have suffered human rights abuses due to their religious, political or cultural beliefs or activities.

I am deeply concerned about the Chinese government's continued repression of the Tibetan people. The PRC continues to commit horrible human rights abuses, including instances of torture, arbitrary arrest, detention without public trial, and lengthy detention of Tibetan nationalists for peacefully expressing their political or religious views.

Two weeks ago, 78 of my colleagues in Congress and I wrote to Vice President Hu condemning the execution of Mr. Lobsang Dhondup. We also strongly urged him to commute the sentences of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche and Tserang Dondrup, and to release the others currently being held in connection with this case. These individuals were held incommunicado and suffered torture, and their trials were conducted under highly restrictive conditions and without counsel of their choosing.

The Chinese government denied all requests by the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu to observe these legal proceedings that reportedly did not meet United Nations' minimum standards of due process. Such abuses of judicial processes and disingenuous actions on