

DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR,
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED
AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS
BILL HAS TERRIBLE EFFECTS
FOR AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to call attention to the big let-down that is the fiscal year 2004 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies bill just passed by this House. I want to commend my colleague, the ranking member of the Committee on Appropriations, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), for his tireless efforts to reverse the terrible effects of this bill on the less fortunate in our country. I cannot believe that in the face of the many needs that remain, this body was unwilling, either in committee or as a body, to just cut a small amount from the highest tax cuts to fund them.

Mr. Speaker, as a physician I am very concerned, as we all should be, that our health care system in this country remains in serious peril, and the bill before us today does very little to reverse the downward spiral. Our flawed system is falling short on its promise and contributing to the disabling illness and premature death of the people it is supposed to serve.

The picture is worse for African Americans who, for almost every illness, are impacted most severely and disproportionately and, in some cases, more than all other minorities combined. Every day in this country, there are at least 200 African American deaths which could have been prevented. This bill does nothing to reduce or address this whatsoever.

Today, we know that they happen because even when we have access to care, the medical evaluations and treatments that are made available to everyone else are denied to us, not only in the private sector, but in the public system as well.

The current, strongly held-to "cost containment" paradigm, while it sounds good on the surface, has obviously not worked. What it has done instead is to create a multi-tiered system of care, both within the managed care system and without. Those at the lowest rungs of the system get sicker; the sicker, therefore, are more costly, were and still are being dropped, and those who are the sickest are blocked out entirely. So not only are health care costs continuing to escalate; the overall health picture in this country is worse than ever.

Passing this bill means we will just continue on the path of fostering a separate and unequal health care system.

It provides the smallest percentage increase since 1998 for the administration's centerpiece, the community health centers, which serve 13 million people who lack access to health services in rural and urban areas.

The bill provides no increase at all for the Maternal and Child Health block grant or the National Health Service Corps, leaving many pregnant mothers and infants without services at a time when this administration and Congress have singled out the safety net of Medicaid for attack. It further harms our children by providing no increase for the childhood immunization program, which is already having trouble keeping up with the rising costs of vaccinating children.

This so-called appropriation bill completely ignores recommendations from the Institute of Medical Reports which we commissioned and paid for. Despite an important recommendation for more minority health care providers to overcome discrimination in the health system, which is critical to eliminating health care disparities, this bill cuts programs that help students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds prepare for and do well in medical school and other health professional schools.

It further freezes funding for the Health Professions Training Program at the 2003 level. This program provides scholarship and student loan repayment assistance for doctors, or it would, and dentists, who agree to work in medically underserved areas. It is a key source of health professionals to staff community health centers and rural health clinics, making the small increase to community health centers another empty promise.

As a supposed sign of generosity, the bill provides a negligible 0.3 percent increase over the current year for the Ryan White program, which will mean that that program will fall further behind the rising costs and needs of the AIDS community. But in a cruel twist, the bill increases funding for AIDS drugs assistance programs, which provide access to drug therapies and needed treatments to sustain and improve the lives of those living with HIV and AIDS by \$39 million, but it pays for that increase largely by cutting \$33 million from other Ryan White programs; and it still keeps the program underfunded by about \$100 million. States are reporting every day growing lines of waiting lists for people waiting for treatment.

We have problems with the administration's new initiative to focus on HIV-positive persons at the expense of primary prevention. But even then, few, if any, resources are being provided for the health services needed to help people with HIV remain as healthy as possible and slow the transmission of the virus because of the cutbacks in the Ryan White program.

The Members of the Congressional Black Caucus have made a sustained effort to ensure that our poor and minority communities across the country have access to AIDS services. What will happen with this bill is, tragically, that the funds will not be available to build a capacity of our community-based organizations to help patients

reach lifesaving medicines once those patients have been identified.

Mr. Speaker, the fiscal year 2004 Labor-HHS bill would be considered a joke if the programs were not so critical to the lives of the American people. I wish that I could hope for it to be fixed during conference, but the President and the Republican leadership here have, through their tax cut and ill-advised war, and their commitment to provide for Iraq what they will not provide for people in this country, have made it next to impossible for us to provide the needed funds to make our own people whole.

I think that the leadership here is probably happy that they passed this bill, but it is a bad day for the people of the United States.

TRIBUTE TO ANTHONY
CELEBREZZE, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, tonight I come to the floor with a heavy heart because Ohio has lost one of her favorite sons on the 4th of July. I have asked for this time to say a few words on behalf of the people of our great State on the life of Anthony J. Celebrezze, Jr., who died of a heart attack last Saturday at age 61.

Tony had just finished a heated race in his replica 1937 Chevy at a speedway in central Ohio. He loved competition, he loved turning a wrench, and he loved getting behind the wheel of his Legends car.

No one would have known that he came from one of the most distinguished political families in Ohio history.

Tony's father, Anthony J. Celebrezze, was mayor of Cleveland for 5 years and then served in President John F. Kennedy's cabinet as Secretary of what was then called Health, Education, and Welfare.

Tony was a graduate of John Marshall High School in Cleveland and went on to the U.S. Naval Academy class of 1963. He served 5 years in the Navy and earned the Naval Commendation Medal.

He received his law degree from Cleveland State University and launched his successful political career in 1974, winning election to the Ohio Senate.

In 1978, he was elected Secretary of State and served one term. In 1982 he won the election as Ohio's Attorney General and won reelection in 1986. Tony was a very popular Ohio figure. He ran unsuccessfully for Governor in 1990.

As Attorney General, Tony Celebrezze won accolades for his efforts to protect consumers and the environment. He made our State a better place.

As the Columbus Dispatch noted, what those of us who knew Tony remember most about him was his decency, his warmth, and his humanity.