

and reservations about specific parts of the plan. Nearly 30 percent were not sure how they felt or had no opinion at all.

In a series of town hall meetings I recently had in my district in south Alabama, I received more questions regarding this plan and how it would impact the seniors in my district and their families. These questions and the survey results are not surprising. Such sweeping changes in a program as important as Medicare, which has basically remained consistent since its inception since the 1960s, undoubtedly has caused some confusion.

In an effort to help answer some of these questions and help clear up some of the clouds of confusion that exist, I will be hosting two senior citizen seminars on Monday, June 7, in my district in south Alabama. The primary focus of these events is to focus the attention on the Medicare bill.

I am pleased that representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services will be in attendance to help answer questions, as well as my friend and our colleague, the distinguished gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY), who will also be on hand to discuss this important issue. Before beginning his outstanding service here in the Congress, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) was a practicing physician. And he is well qualified not only as a legislator but also as someone who has participated in the medical profession for so many years of his life.

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Moreover, I have representatives from the Social Security Administration as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs to answer other questions that are pertinent to our senior citizens at this twilight of their lives.

My hope is that these two seminars, the first in Fairhope, Alabama, and the second in Mobile, will do much to provide useful information to help answer questions that are so important and so timely.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleagues on both sides of the political aisle to do likewise in their district, to try to reach out and help explain some of the questions that still exist with this new law. The assistance this program is providing is desperately needed by our senior citizens.

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

(Mr. KIND 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 gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. TERRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. TERRY 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 gentleman from Indiana (Ms. CARSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. CARSON of Indiana addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

HONORING OUR CONGRESSIONAL PAGES

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

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, it is my sincerest pleasure that I rise to recognize and compliment the congressional pages that will be ending their term of service this week.

The House pages have made up the critically important staff that has kept the House floor running smoothly for over 200 years. This 2003–2004 school year pages were selected from hundreds of applicants following an incredibly competitive process that scrutinizes their individual achievements in academics, leadership, and complement to social and civic service.

Page duties include delivering all types of correspondence and legislative materials throughout the Capitol and House office buildings, answering phones in the Members cloak room, relaying messages, flying flags over the Capitol, and preparing the House floor for session and many other duties.

These pages have spent their entire junior year of high school in Washington, D.C. living, taking classes, and working for the House. The typical day of a page begins very early at 5:45 a.m. or 6 a.m. to eat breakfast prior to attending classes for school at 6:45 a.m. At 10 a.m. their legislative work day begins and lasts until the House adjourns in the evening and sometimes into the wee early morning hours. These individuals, I think, Mr. Speaker, have demonstrated their true commitment to playing an important role in our Nation's future by learning and working here in the Nation's Capitol.

We honor those pages that have shown the same generosity of spirit and depth of intelligence and capacity for human service that is so important of our leaders. These exceptional students have consistently displayed their dedication, intelligence, and concern throughout their time as a page in Congress. They stand out among their peers not only because of their many achievements but also the disciplined manner in which they meet all challenges.

I compliment the administration and those that have guided these pages. And although these pages have already accomplished a great deal, these young people possess unlimited potential. The House pages are young men and women of character, ambition and initiative who have made a significant contribution to the United States House of Representatives and have learned well the

value of hard work and commitment. Their efforts and dedication are very much appreciated and our very best wishes bestowed upon them in all of their future endeavors that I am sure for some will include elected office, including Congress. I suspect all will be leaders in their community.

On behalf of the United States House of Representatives, we extend our thanks and our highest praise and congratulations to each congressional page.

AMERICA NEEDS AN ENERGY POLICY

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

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to ask the question, How long can America afford to not have an energy policy in place?

For many years we had cheap energy in this country. We had oil for over a decade at about \$10 a barrel and natural gas around \$2 a thousand, but that has all changed.

Today we have oil constantly popping past the \$40-per-barrel mark. The natural gas that we were putting in the ground today for next winter's heating \$6.47 a thousand. Last year the world was shocked when we put it in the ground at \$4.60 a thousand for the next heating season during the winter.

The question I ask again and again is when will we put an energy policy on the President's desk so he can sign it? He is the first President to continually ask Congress for an energy policy, an energy plan. Other Presidents ignored it. We have an education policy, but no energy policy. We have a defense policy, but no energy policy. We have an ag policy, but no energy policy. A transportation policy, an environmental policy, trade policies, but no energy policy.

I live within 5 miles in Pennsylvania of Drake's Well, the first oil well which was drilled in 1859; and when oil was discovered, it changed the world. It brought about the industrial revolution and the modernization of our society, and today the world consumes 80 million barrels daily. We use about one fourth, 20 million barrels; and our use continues to rise.

The alarming fact is that China and India are now growing faster in energy use than us and competing with us for foreign oil. And as the world economy begins to really grow, and it is, the demand continues to rise. Our problem is 50 percent of our oil comes from unstable parts of the world. We have no control over oil prices. We have no control over energy costs. And coupling that problem with the natural gas issue, which is new, just a few years ago it was \$2 a thousand. Today, they continue to sky rocket. Four years ago, it was less than 3, usually 2-something. Last year, we were putting in the ground at \$4.70 at this time of the year.

On the average of almost \$6 over the year. Today we are putting it in the ground for next year at \$6.47, and some think gas will be 7 to \$8 a thousand this winter.

The problem that raises is that we are not competitive. Europe pays \$3.70 a thousand. North Africa \$1.20; all the others are under that. So the rest of the world has natural gas much cheaper than us.

Now, what is that doing to business in this country? It is eliminating the fertilizer business in this country as we speak. You cannot afford to make fertilizer in America because they use it as an ingredient and as a fuel. It is harming the petrochemical industry, which is quickly moving to Europe. Polymers and plastics and anybody that heats, bakes, cooks, melts or dries products with natural gas has a problem. We produce 85 percent of our natural gas in this country. We import 14.5 percent from Canada; a percent and a half of liquefied natural gas from numerous parts around the world; and we export about 1 percent of our gas to Mexico.

A decade ago, a moratorium was removed on the generation of electricity with natural gas. I think it is an issue that really needs to be debated again today. At that time, 8 percent of our natural gas was only allowed to be used for peak power, in the morning and evening time when we need that extra surge. But when they removed that moratorium, in a few short years 25 percent of the natural gas in this country is now used to generate electricity.

We have 1,000 rigs drilling, a number higher than most, than normally, but the shortage remains. All of the gas-rich areas in America are off limits to drilling, many legislatively. It has been prohibited to drill the east and west coast offshore. Around the Florida coastline where there is lots of gas, it is off limits. Forty percent of the gulf, and we know the rest of the gulf is rich with gas because we get a lot of it there, is off limits to drilling. Sixty percent of the Midwest, which is owned by the Federal Government, much of it is off limits to drilling or it takes years to get a permit.

We must somehow figure out if we are going to use natural gas to generate electricity, how we replace that supply because we are threatening homeownership, we are draining commerce, and we are threatening industries in this country that particularly use a lot of natural gas.

The question I ask again, Can we afford to float down the river aimlessly with no plan of action, no energy policy on the President's desk?

Yes, we must conserve and we must use energy more wisely and we must promote renewables, but the growth has not been there. Wind and solar are only used part of the time so you have to have an abundant source. America needs an energy plan. It needs to be on the President's desk tomorrow.

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

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

BOGUS COLLEGE DEGREES COST GOVERNMENT DEARLY

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

Mr. CHOCOLA. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise in support and cooperation of my colleagues, the Washington Waste Watchers, who were here earlier this evening.

I unfortunately come to the floor tonight to share another example of wasted taxpayer dollars. Mr. Speaker, according to a report released by the General Accounting Office in May, taxpayers have paid hundreds and thousands of dollars and, in reality, probably much, much more for Federal employees to obtain bogus degrees from unaccredited postsecondary schools, also known as diploma mills. These so-called diploma mills sell academic degrees based upon life experience, sometimes based on negligible academic work, and some require no academic work at all. They simply sell degrees for a price.

The first 2 days of congressional hearings on fake degree-granting institutions, the director of GAO special investigations testified the data collected on just two of those diploma mills show Federal payments of almost \$170,000 for bogus degrees. He also said the number is likely an underestimate, even for those two institutions; and he expects a broader investigation of nearly 140 known diploma mills would reveal many more cases of federally financed phony degrees.

The GAO report found that 463 Federal employees, including 28 senior-level officials, have listed diploma mill degrees on their resumes. And one of those senior-level officials even received a Federal tuition reimbursement of nearly \$2,000 in connection with a phony degree from a bogus school.

Mr. Speaker, Democrats want to raise our tax to pay for more of this. That is just the tip of the iceberg because the GAO only received data from eight government agencies. The other agencies could not even respond to the inquiry. As an example, the Department of Health and Human Services told the GAO that it could not produce records of employee education payments because it maintains records in five different accounting systems. It has no way to differentiate academic degree payments from other types of training and does not know whether degree payments made with credit cards are even captured in its payment records.

What is worse, Mr. Speaker, is the taxpayers have given these fake-degree

employees a raise. Now while their managers contend that their promotions were based on experience and not education, the GAO does not buy it and neither do I.

Mr. Speaker, developing simple standards for assessing the degrees used as credentials by Federal employees in determining which degrees, if any, the Federal Government should pay for, these agencies could have saved hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Federal Government to clean up its act. It is time to hold Federal employees accountable for its actions. And by eliminating this type of waste, fraud and abuse government-wide, we can save the taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, our measurement of success here in Washington should never be how much we spend, but simply how well we spend taxpayer dollars.

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

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

IRAQ WATCH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. DELAHUNT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, we are here tonight, several of my colleagues will be joining me for our weekly hour that we describe as the Iraq Watch, which reviews issues of interest and concern to Members on both sides of the aisle as well as the American people.

But before we begin talking about events of the past several weeks in Iraq, Afghanistan, in the Middle East, I was conversing earlier with my colleague from the State of Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT) regarding some of the statements given earlier on the floor by our colleagues and friends from the Republican side of the aisle. And I want to commend them and congratulate them for taking this issue of waste and fraud and abuse seriously.

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I understand that they are describing themselves as waste watchers. I can assure them that we will work together with them. We will cooperate and we will collaborate. Because, as the gentleman who last spoke indicated, it is absolutely essential that we use taxpayers' dollars efficiently, honestly and bring the highest possible return on the investment of those dollars in the American people.

In fact, I am really pleased that this is happening, and I dare say if our Republican colleagues reach out to Democrats that we will join with them and