

There have been a lot of efforts to mischaracterize what this bill does, what our proposal does. Quite frankly, we're in that sausage-making process now. We have three committees in the House that are working on health care reform. We have two committees in the Senate that are trying to accomplish the same thing, and we have a 1,000-page bill. There are thousands and thousands of pages of legislation that are designed to finally build a kind of health care system that is responsive to the needs of the American citizens and, more importantly, that is responsive to the Nation, its future and its economy.

So I'm not surprised that Americans are a little bit uncertain about what we're doing here, because, again, we're still in that process; but I can assure the people watching tonight, the American public, that the battle lines are about to be drawn. This bill is going to come into focus as the final committee of three in our House reports the legislation out. Over the next month, we will take the argument to the American people. We're very confident that, once the American people understand what we're doing and how we're going to improve their situations, they will overwhelmingly support our proposal.

What the American people want—and what my constituents in Louisville, Kentucky want, what the constituents in New Jersey, in Washington, in New York, and in California all want—is basically the same thing: they want security for life in health care for themselves and for their families. If they're going to lose their jobs, if they're going to lose their coverage, if they want to change jobs, if they want to go back to school or if they want to make those important life decisions, they want the stability of insurance so they don't have to worry about whether a pre-existing condition or something in their health histories will prevent them from being covered. They won't have to worry about getting sick and about having their policies rescinded, as we've heard much evidence about. Most importantly, they will be able to go to sleep every night knowing that a disease or an illness will not bankrupt them and will not change their standard of living.

These are the things we're about to do for the American people, for ourselves as well, because we know, as the Republicans know, if we accomplish this major, major goal, we will have the everlasting appreciation of the American public. We know that because the Republicans have said it.

We heard a Senator the other day say, Well, if we can defeat health care reform, it will be President Obama's Waterloo. He will be finished.

We know from a Republican consultant, Frank Luntz, of his memo 3 months ago, which states, We cannot afford to let the Democrats succeed on getting health care reform. We have no answer to that, but we've got to stop it at all costs.

That's what they've been trying to do. They've been talking about things that are nowhere in the bill. They've been talking about comparisons with Canada, which, by the way, is the only country in the world that does health care the way they do it. As I asked a witness at one of our hearings in Ways and Means: Other than hockey, what have we ever copied from Canada?

□ 1915

We can do something very special in this country. We can create a unique American solution that will bring choice and competition—the two things that have characterized American society throughout its history—to our health care environment by using choice and competition, by creating a public option for American citizens to participate in that will compete with private insurance companies. We can make private insurance companies better, and we can make health insurance more affordable for every American.

This is our goal. This is what we know that H.R. 3200 will do, and we look forward, over the next month, in taking this argument to the American people, because the case we have is a winning case. The hand we have is a winning hand, and we know that the American people will embrace what we are attempting to do.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Mrs. BACHMANN) is recognized for 5 minutes. (Mrs. BACHMANN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

WAYS AND MEANS HEALTH REFORM BILL

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

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, health care reform may be the single most important issue Members will vote on during their entire legislative career. The issue affects every American. Health care affects our economy at home and our ability to compete internationally.

For the first time in almost 20 years, we have a real opportunity to solve America's health care crisis, and the American people have spoken clearly and overwhelmingly that they want Congress to produce a solution that puts the American people's interests ahead of special interests.

To say there is urgency in what we need to do is an understatement, and for the last several months, the three committees in the House have been working separately and collaboratively on health care legislation. Two of the committees, including the Ways and Means Committee where I serve, reported bills out of committee to the

floor. And I want to explain why the Ways and Means Committee's bill is the best bill and is vital to the success of health care reform.

Let's start with Medicare.

For senior citizens, Medicare is health security. The program is so effectively managed that 97 cents of every dollar goes for patient care, and that means it's 97 percent efficient. In many private insurance company programs, 40 cents of every dollar simply goes for overhead, advertising, paper, not delivering health care. So the smart choice is to develop health care legislation based on a proven model, and that's what we did in the Ways and Means Committee.

A new model with a strong public option based on the Medicare model, which has delivered quality health care to seniors and a very comfortable living to doctors and other medical professionals across this country, that's what we need today.

Without a strong public option, health care reform is just a slogan. And without real cost control, health care reform is just another press release. America spends twice as much on health care as any other industrialized nation in the world, and runaway costs are bankrupting average Americans and consuming an even greater part of our gross domestic product than before. The situation is unsustainable.

Now, we talk about the need to address preexisting conditions when it comes to health care, and we should. But runaway costs are a preexisting economic condition we must fix in the new legislation or we're setting ourselves up for failure.

Recent changes to the legislation have scrapped the proven legislative effective and fair model we have in Medicare and substituted negotiated rates making the government negotiate with doctors. On the surface, it may look fair, but looks can be deceiving. The private sector has had decades of opportunities to make health care work, and the economic wreckage of that is everywhere to be seen. Now they want more.

The legislation now would call for negotiations. Let me tell you what that means. So-called negotiated rates do not limit what can be charged or the rate of increase each year. A public option tied to Medicare is the only way to control the costs; otherwise, health care costs will keep going up and Americans will keep getting left out.

While the rich can always take care of themselves—health care at any price—the middle class and the disadvantaged will remain one accident or illness away from financial ruin in the richest country in the world. That sounds like the status quo, right? We don't need any more of that.

Under the chairmanship of CHARLIE RANGEL, the Ways and Means Committee tackled these tough issues and produced health care reform legislation that's fair for providers and affordable for the American people.