the extraordinary success and impact this program has had on our country.

Any changes that are made hastily will be devastating to the program and to the seniors that depend on Medicare. Although this program is in need of reform, it must not be done without debate and discussion and it must not be done by taking away health care from seniors who depend on it for their survival.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from West Virginia [Mr. WISE] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. WISE 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 gentlewoman from New York [Mrs. MALONEY] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mrs. MALONEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas [Mr. GENE GREEN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. GENE GREEN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE MUST BE ALLOWED TO PERFORM ITS WORK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas [Mr. STENHOLM] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, yesterday a very alarming happening occurred in the House Agriculture Committee. For the first time in recollection, the leadership of this House took away the prerogative of the Agriculture Committee for doing its work, in this case on a reconciliation bill. It was not that the Agriculture Committee was not trying to do its work, and I take great exception to a statement that was made by the chairman that says, ''This situation, which has caused the differences of opinion, has been made more difficult because our Democratic colleagues have opted for a destructive role in the process.'' I do not see how anyone could make that statement with a clear conscience.

Mr. Speaker, we had a Democratic alternative, we have a Democratic alternative, and we will fight for that alternative, and that alternative for the budget reconciliation process says that basically we think $400 billion in cuts from Medicare and Medicaid are excessive, that the additional cuts in education being proposed are excessive, and that the $13.4 billion in cuts from agricultural programs are excessive when they are used for purposes of granting a tax cut. We will show on this floor that there is an alternative and we hope that there will be 21 votes for that alternative.

However, yesterday the leadership of this body decided that unless the Agriculture Committee reports a politically correct solution, we do not want to see it. That is disturbing.

□ 1800

No witnesses have ever been called on the Freedom to Farm Act. I am the ranking member of the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities. I was never informed that there were ever considered to be hearings on the Freedom to Farm Act. The only time we heard about it is when it came from the leadership of this body in suggesting that that is the way we ought to go to the reconciliation committee.

We have a Democratic alternative. It was voted on in the Ag Committee and it was voted down predictably because we do not have the votes and I understand that. But I think it stretches the point when we say when there were 2 Republicans who offered an alternative and some of us who even disagreed with the 13.4, the majority of Democrats voted for a bipartisan substitute, but we were unable to get votes from the Republicans for that. It stretches the imagination and it stretches the truth when we read and we hear what is going on.

It bothers me greatly when the leadership of this House suggests to the Committee on Agriculture that unless you do our will, our bidding, we may even consider eliminating the Committee on Agriculture, and put it in writing.

Now, I do not know what is going on, but as a Member of this body who has traditionally participated in bipartisan action, who shares the frustration of the American people that we are constantly fighting Democrats and Republicans, I do not know what is happening in this body now when the hand of bipartisanship is not being offered, in fact it is being cut off regularly.

When we look at what happened yesterday in the Committee on Agriculture, it is a very disturbing trend. I hope that as we proceed now to the budget reconciliation that the general public will begin to understand there are alternatives out there, there are ways to balance the budget by the year 2002, and it does not require gutting rural America, health care, it does not require an absolute total change in philosophy of farm programs.

Let us never forget for a moment, are we not all blessed to live in a country that has the most abundant food supply, the best quality of food, the safest food supply at the lowest cost of any other country in the world, warts and all? All of the criticism we are hearing from the editorial boards that agree with the Freedom to Farm Act because they want to eliminate farm policy, should we the American people not stop for just a moment and say, maybe just maybe American agriculture is doing a few things right? And not have to follow blindly a philosophical leadership of this House that does not have a clue about farm policy and agriculture but has a great philosophical belief that somehow, someway by eliminating farm programs we are going to do better?

It is not a budget question, it is a philosophical question. The sooner we start debating these things on this floor and in the Committee on Agriculture and not getting mad and taking our bat and going home, the sooner we will get on with the kind of policies required for this country to see that we continue to have this abundant food supply.

REPUBLICANS PROPOSE CUT IN MEDICARE PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BUNN of Oregon). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Alabama [Mr. HILLIARD] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HILLIARD. Mr. Speaker, the general public is outraged at the Republicans' scheme to destroy Medicare, especially since it is common knowledge that the Republican proposal is cutting $270 billion from Medicare just to give wealthy persons a tax cut.

The new and fresh Republicans are supposed to represent the people, not the Republican Party. Several recent polls indicate that the American public is highly skeptical of Republican efforts to cut Medicare.

Let us listen to what the American people are saying as set out by a series of independent polls that have recently been taken. Seventy-one percent of Americans have very little or no trust at all in House Republicans to handle the Medicare financing problems. This was a poll taken by the Associated Press.

Sixty-eight percent of Americans place no trust in the Republicans on the issue of Medicare. This is by a Time/CNN poll.

Fifty-three percent of Americans oppose the Republican plan to offer vouchers to seniors as a way of reducing costs. This is an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll.

Only 19 percent of Americans offered support for a Republican plan to make large cuts in Medicare. Yes, this is by Time/CNN. CNN, right in the heart of the South.

Seventy-five percent of Americans oppose cutting Medicare to pay for tax breaks. Once again, NBC/Wall Street Journal.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, 76 percent of Americans believe it is more important to maintain Medicare as it is than reducing the budget deficit. That needs to be repeated; 76 percent. That is from CBS.

All of these polls are independent in nature. None of them have anything to do with the Republican or with the Democratic Party.

Mr. Speaker, the message is clear. The message from our fellow Americans is also clear. Americans throughout this country insist that the current Medicare plan that is in place be preserved as is. This is a message to each one of us as a Member of this body, disregarding party.

MEDICARE ALTERNATIVE HEARINGS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. SCOTT] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Speaker, all Americans should be concerned about the proposed massive cuts in the Medicare Program—not simply because they may affect current and future benefits under the program, but they will affect health care cost for all of us.

A large percentage of the $270 billion reduction comes from cuts in payments to health care providers. All employers should be especially concerned about such massive reductions, because ultimately they will have to pay for them.

The problem is that the same number of people will get sick and require the same amount of care, regardless of how their care is paid for. Paying providers less for that care under the Medicare Program does nothing about costs other than to pass them on to Medicare beneficiaries and other paying patients. There is a big difference between controlling costs and simply not paying the bills.

Last year, we learned from our efforts to reform the health care delivery system in this country that it is like a balloon—if you squeeze it in one place, it pops out in another. Likewise when health care providers give care to patients who cannot or do not pay the full cost, those providers shift the cost of that care to patients who pay the going rate by charging them more to make up for the uncompensated care. We will see those higher costs in our insurance premiums and in higher copays, deductibles, and prices for medical procedures.

Higher health care costs will also mean more costly care as people avoid addressing minor problems to save money and those problems become emergencies or require acute care. Thus, we will all pay more and get less if the proposed Republican plan goes into effect.

Of course, there is one group who is not worried about the cost-shifting and the higher medical costs. That group is the upper 20 percent of high income taxpayers who will receive 80 percent of the $250 billion dollar tax cut funded by the Republican plan to reduce Medicare.

While we all agree that we need a long-term fix of the Medicare financing plan, we do not have to put those dependent upon Medicare in jeopardy to do so, especially if the reason is to pay for a tax cut to benefit mostly wealthy individuals. We have made adjustments in the program before to keep it viable; we can do that now for a lot less than $270 billion if we do not have to make room in the budget for a $250 billion tax cut.

The real solution to the Medicare financing issue is to fix it in the context of universal health care. Neither Medicare nor any other part of the health delivery system can be permanently fixed on a stand-alone basis. That is why hearings are needed to hear from experts, not just politicians, on what is needed and how long it will take to fix the program in a fiscally sound manner that does not impose unnecessary hardships on beneficiaries.

The current approach to fixing Medicare is a cure worse than the disease. Taking $270 billion from beneficiaries to justify a $250 billion tax cut to mostly benefit wealthy individuals is certainly not the way to do it.

WHY CUT $270 BILLION FROM MEDICARE?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Carolina [Mr. CLYBURN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Speaker, we have heard quite a bit of debate in recent weeks over Medicare and then $270 billion cut that we are proposing to make in Medicare.

Of course every time I begin discussion of this with various people, I am asked time and time again to give the difference in what we are talking about as we talk about part A and part B.

I want to take just a moment, Mr. Speaker, to talk about those two separate parts, to explain the difference so that people out there listening will get an idea of what we are talking about, because it is very important for them to understand that all of this debate that we are undertaking here sometimes has very little to do with what really ails them.

Medicare has two separate parts, Medicare part A and Medicare part B. Medicare part A is the Medicare hospital insurance program which mostly covers inpatient hospital stays. Medicare part A is financed through the Medicare trust fund. Like Social Security, employers and workers pay into the Medicare trust fund while an individual is working through a dedicated payroll tax, a 1.45-percent tax paid by employers and a 1.45-percent tax paid by workers.

Medicare part B is the Medicare medical insurance program which covers such other medical services as doctor services, hospital outpatient services, clinical, laboratories, and durable medical equipment. Medicare part B is financed in a completely different way than Medicare part A. Medicare part B is financed through a combination of premiums paid by Medicare beneficiaries and general revenue.

As we listen to all this debate about insolvency, the American public must understand that it is only the Medicare part A trust fund that faces an insolvency problem in the year 2002. However, we recently heard from the administrator of this program that the insolvency problem could be solved with a modification or a correction or a reform, if you would like to call it that, of $89 billion. That would keep this program solvent through the year 2002.

We must then ask the question, if the administrator says that that is all that is required, why then are we pushing $270 billion in modifications to this program?

I say, Mr. Speaker, that we are doing that simply to cover the cost of this $240 billion tax cut that we are proposing to give to those who do not need it. In fact, the bulk of that tax cut will go to people who make over $100,000 a year, most of whom that I talk to as I visit my district tell me they are not asking for a tax cut, they do not need a tax cut, and they do not want a tax cut.

So, then, why are we doing it?

There are two things being lost in all of this. One, of course, is Medicaid, a $182 billion cut in Medicaid, programs for the poor.

□ 1815

What is going to happen when we undertake that cut? Well, it means that a lot of people who today find themselves using services like stays-in-homes are going to find themselves without the ability to do that, and that means that many young couples, young families, are going to find themselves hard-pressed to take care of the elderly when the Government gets out of that business.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this time offered me, and I want to say that I hope, as we go forward with this debate, that we will continue to educate the American people as to the difference between part A and part B.

THE FIGHT FOR A FAIR DEAL FOR FARM PRODUCERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BUNN of Oregon). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. BISHOP] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP. Mr. Speaker, when jurisdiction over farm commodity programs is transferred from the Agriculture Committee to the Budget and Rules Committees, it is an unprecedented attempt by the Republican leadership in this body to stifle the influence of Members who represent the interests of our farmers.

It is an abuse of power.

It is a slap in the face of America's farmers.

It should outrage everyone who is concerned about the future of rural communities.

There is one thing you can say about this development: It may be an abuse of power, and it is bipartisan abuse. It not only seeks to shut out the voice of