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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore [Mr. NETHERCUTT].

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 3, 1997.

I hereby designate the Honorable GEORGE R. NETHERCUTT, Jr., to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NEWT GINGRICH,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 21, 1997, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority and minority leaders limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] for 5 minutes.

DEMOCRATS HAVE TAKEN LEAD ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, in the coming days, I am hopeful that a children's health care initiative will emerge as a result of the budget reconciliation process. It is my understanding that approximately \$16 billion over 5 years has been set aside in the budget to provide money to help families obtain health coverage for their children.

Since last year, Mr. Speaker, when the Democrats developed the Families First agenda, children's health care has

been a high priority. Although Republicans have failed to realize that 10 million uninsured children in this country is a problem that needs to be addressed, I have to assure my colleagues that Democrats have not let the needs of these children fall on deaf ears. As one of the three cochairs of the Democratic Health Care Task Force, we have held hearings and meetings with child advocacy groups and various health care providers who have all been very clear in expressing the need for Federal involvement in this issue.

Two months ago, I and a number of my colleagues on the Democratic side sent a letter urging that the Republican leaders move legislation forward by Mother's Day that would benefit the uninsured children. Since then, the GOP has really done nothing about the issue while each day more children enter the ranks of the uninsured.

Just as an example, Mr. Speaker, in my home State of New Jersey, over 200,000 children are currently without health insurance, according to a very good estimate. That many children should not be without health insurance in this Nation if we think about what it means nationwide. Many do not realize that over 90 percent of all uninsured children are in working families whose employer does not offer health insurance or who just cannot because the family or the policy that the employer provides, they just cannot afford to pay the skyrocketing costs.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that Democrats understand these statistics and the Democratic Health Care Task Force has developed a proposal to address the problem of uninsured kids. Our task force plan would strengthen Medicaid, create a new flexible matching grant program for working families and enact important health insurance reforms. And this proposal, the Democratic Health Care Task Force proposal, can be considered now that Re-

publicans are being forced to address this issue as a result of the \$16 billion set aside for children's health care under the balanced budget resolution.

Of the 10 million uninsured children, approximately 3 million are already eligible for Medicaid. But what we do in our plan is provide grants to States to help local communities in developing outreach programs to take these 3 million children out of the ranks of uninsured, with maximum flexibility to employee communities resources. So first, what we are doing is to try to get to the kids that already are eligible for Medicaid but for whatever reason are not signed up.

In addition, our Democratic plan will enable children to remain eligible for Medicaid for a full year from the time they are determined eligible. At present, the status is evaluated many times in a given year, oftentimes leading to children having health care insurance one month but not another. This change will offer continuity and allow parents to be more at ease with the guarantee that their child will not lose health care coverage from one month to the next.

The Democratic plan creates Medikids, which is a new matching grant program that will provide States with the necessary resources to seek innovative State solutions to meet the needs of uninsured children in working families. States would be eligible for extra money if they expand Medicaid coverage to cover pregnant women up to 185 percent of the poverty level and all children through the age of 18 in families below 100 percent of the poverty level. Just to give an example, Mr. Speaker, my home State of New Jersey already covers pregnant women up to 185 percent of the poverty level, but they only cover children up to the age of 13. So if they expand that to 18, they then will not only have an expanded Medicaid Program, but they would be able to take advantage of the new

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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