good for part of the premium for private coverage. Medicare beneficiaries could use this voucher to buy into the fee-for-service plan sponsored by the Federal Government or to join a private plan.

To encourage consumer price sensitivity, the voucher would track to the lowest cost private plan; Medicare privatizers tell us that seniors could then shop for the plan that best suits their needs, paying the balance of the premium and extra if they want higher quality care. The proposal would create a new, private system of health coverage but it would abandon Medicare's fundamental principle of egalitarianism.

Today, the Medicare program is income-blind. All seniors have access to the same level of care. The idea that vouchers would empower seniors to choose a health plan that best suits their needs is simply, Mr. Speaker, a myth. The reality is that seniors will be forced to accept whatever plan they can afford.

The goal of the Medicare Commission was to ensure the program's long-term solvency. This proposal will not do that. Supporters of the voucher plan say it would shave 1 percent per year from the Medicare budget over the next few decades. That is still not enough to prevent insolvency, and it is based frankly on overly optimistic projections of private sector performance. Bruce Vladeck, a former administrator of the Medicare program and a commission member, doubted the commission plan would save the government even a dime.

Efforts to privatize Medicare are, of course, nothing new. Medicare beneficiaries have long been able to enroll in private managed care plans. Their experience, however, does not bode well for a full-fledged privatization effort. These managed care plans are already calling for higher government payments. They are dropping out of unprofitable markets and they are cutting back on benefits to America's elderly.

Managed care plans are profit driven and they do not tough it out when those profits are unrealized. We learned this lesson the hard way last year when 96 Medicare HMOs deserted more than 400,000 Medicare beneficiaries, including in Lorain and Trumbull Counties, Ohio, because the HMOs did not meet their profit objectives.

Before the Medicare program was launched in 1965, more than half the Nation's seniors were uninsured. Private insurance was the only option for the elderly, but insurers did not want seniors to join their plans because they knew that seniors would actually use most of their coverage. The private insurance market has changed considerably since then, but it still avoids high risk enrollees and, whenever possible, dodges the bill for high-cost medical services.

The problem is not necessarily malice or greed. It is the expectation that private insurers can serve two masters, the bottom line and the common good. Logically, always looking to the bottom line, our system of private insurance has left 43 million uninsured individuals in the United States. If the private insurance industry cannot figure out how to cover these people, most of whom are middle-income workers and children, how will they treat high-risk, high-cost seniors?

If we privatize Medicare, we are telling America that not all seniors deserve the same level of quality health care. We are betting on a private insurance system that puts its own interests ahead of health care quality and a balanced Federal budget.

The Medicare Commission wisely disbanded without delivering a final product. Premium support proponents must realize that they cannot make Medicare privatization look like an equitable, fair alternative to the public program upon which 36 million seniors in this country depend. Premium support backers also have repeatedly tried to scare America's seniors by predicting that Medicare will go bankrupt.

Congress would not let Medicare go bankrupt any more than it would let the Department of Defense run out of money.

The goal is simple. Let us keep Medicare the successful public program it has always been.

TROOPS TO TEACHERS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. HEFLEY) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. HEFLEY. Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the Troops to Teachers Program Improvement Act of 1999. This legislation will enable retiring military personnel to find rewarding second careers as teachers in our Nation's public schools.

As we all know, our schools and students are in desperate need of more high-quality teachers. This bill, which I am introducing with the support of my colleagues, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS), the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. HILL), will help provide those teachers. This bill not only reauthorizes Troops to Teachers, but also strengthens and improves the enormously successful program.

Troops to Teachers was created in 1994 to assist military personnel who were affected by military downsizing find second careers in which they could utilize their knowledge, professional skills and expertise in our Nation's schools. The program offers counseling and assistance to help participants identify teacher certification programs and employment opportunities.

Since its authorization in 1994, Troops to Teachers has helped over 3,000 active duty soldiers enter our Nation's classrooms and make significant contributions to the lives of our students.

□ 1000

These military personnel turned teachers have established a solid reputation as educators who bring unique real-world experiences to the classroom. They are dedicated, mature, and experienced individuals who have proven to be effective teachers, as well as excellent role models. They are also helping fill a void felt in many public school districts. Over three-quarters of the Troops to Teachers participants are male, compared with about 25 percent in the overall public school system, and over 30 percent of these teachers belong to a minority racial ethnic group.

In addition, a large portion of these teachers are trained in math, science, and engineering, and about half elect to teach in inner city or rural schools. Overall, the retention of these teachers is much higher than the national average.

Not surprisingly, Troops to Teachers is winning glowing reviews from educational administrators, teachers and legislators. Education Secretary Richard Riley praised the program as an new model for recruiting high quality teachers.

School principals and superintendents who have employed Troops to Teachers participants are overwhelmingly supportive of the program. In a 1995–1996 survey, over 75 percent of the principals and superintendents rated Troops to Teachers participants as above average or higher.

The authorization of this successful program is set to expire at the end of this year. My colleagues and I have introduced the Troops to Teachers Program Improvement Act in an effort to reauthorize the program and strengthen some aspects of it so it operates more efficiently and more effectively, and targets the educational needs of our students.

I hope my House colleagues will join me in preserving this education success story by cosponsoring the Troops to Teachers Program Improvement Act.

INDIA MISSILE TEST SHOULD BE SEEN IN CONTEXT OF CHINESE THREAT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MICA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, in light of India's test launch of the Agni missile on Sunday, I want to state today or stress today that the U.S. should look at India's action in light of China's threat to the Indian subcontinent. We should view this step by India in the context of the ongoing threat posed by China, and the fact that Pakistan's missile development program has developed so quickly because of Chinese support.