

Texas, George W. Bush. That same year, Gingrich offered a candid overview of the Republicans' Medicare strategy and said this: "Now, we didn't get rid of it in round one because we just don't think that is politically smart. We don't think that is the right way to go through a transition. But because of what we are doing," he said, "we believe it is going to wither on the vine."

The privatization extremists' next gambit was launched toward the end of the Gingrich era, hidden within the innocent-sounding Medicare+Choice program. The Medicare privatizers told us that HMOs were so efficient compared to government-run Medicare they could provide both basic and enhanced benefits like prescription drugs for less than traditional Medicare spent on basic benefits alone. HMOs initially received a windfall on the taxpayers' dime, because they only wanted to insure the healthiest people, that did not cost much; and that is how they selectively enrolled those healthiest seniors. When that windfall was erased by providing the cost of extra benefits, HMOs came back to Congress asking for more money and abandoned their original efficiency rhetoric and brazenly charged that Medicare had "shortchanged" them.

Did we cut our losses? Did Congress cut our losses and end the Medicare+Choice program? No. For the Medicare privatization crowd in Congress, a private failure was still better than a public success, so Congress again diverted scarce taxpayer dollars from the traditional Medicare program, taking money from the 85 percent of the people who are in traditional fee-for-service, old-time, regular, it-works Medicare and shored up the failed insurance scheme HMO+Choice system.

Now, with the same George W. Bush in the White House who championed the Gingrich Medicare cuts in the mid-1990s to pay for tax cuts for the rich when he was Governor, the time is right, President Bush seems to think, for Republicans to now launch a full-scale attack to privatize Medicare. The Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Committee on Ways and Means are considering radical bills this week, voucher bills, Medicare privatization bills that will end Medicare as we know it, end the Medicare that has been with us for almost 40 years, almost 4 decades, and will end it by the year 2010.

The fact of the matter is the Republican bill will replace Medicare's dependable, affordable and universal coverage with a voucher program. Millions of seniors, already burned by Medicare+Choice abandonments, so many seniors have seen their Medicare HMOs go out of business, leave the State, leave the counties as they have in Lorain and Summit and Medina counties in my district, those same seniors are going to be asked to one more time put their faith in Medicare+Choice, in Medicare HMOs.

Benefits and premiums would vary from county to county, ending the equity embodied by Medicare for a generation, and the Republican bill would cover only a small fraction of the Medicare costs.

The only question is whether the majority of Americans who recognize a success when they see one will let Republicans get away with putting the final stake in Medicare's heart.

#### AMERICANS PAY TOO MUCH FOR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS UNDER UNFAIR SYSTEM

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

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, let me first of all say that the gentleman from Ohio who just spoke, he and I strongly disagree. I happen to believe that it is time to modernize Medicare, it is time to give seniors more choices, and we will come to different conclusions on that particular issue. But there is an issue that we do agree on, and that is that Americans pay far too much for the same pharmaceuticals.

Last week, on Thursday, I was privileged to welcome to the Capitol and to one of my news conferences a true American hero. Her name is Kate Stahl. Kate Stahl wears a little pin that says "Kate Stahl: Old woman." She is 84 years old and she is proud of the fact; in fact, she describes herself as a drug runner. I would encourage Members to get a copy of the June 9 edition of the U.S. News and World Report, and they will see a picture of Kate Stahl in that edition. And in there it says, and she is quoted as saying, "I hope they put me in jail." Because what she does every day, working with the senior Federation in the State of Minnesota, is she helps seniors get access to world-class drugs at world-market prices. As a result, our own Federal Government treats her as if she is a common criminal. But she is prepared to go to jail to make a point, and that is that Americans should not have to pay the world's highest prices for prescription drugs.

We also welcomed to Washington last Thursday Dr. Wenner from Vermont. She is working with pharmacists in Canada so that her patients from her clinics can save, and these are her numbers, have been saving 62 percent on the same prescription drugs by working with pharmacies in Canada.

Now, the FDA acknowledged at a hearing that we had last week that any of the evidence about safety is only anecdotal. As a matter of fact, by their own numbers, they cannot come up with a single case where an American patient has suffered serious injury as a result of taking a legal prescription drug from a pharmacy from a different country. We also know that more people have become seriously ill and some have actually died from eating imported fruits and vegetables. We know

that, for example, in one year, just a few years ago, over 1,100 Americans became seriously ill by eating raspberries that had been imported from Guatemala.

Now, when we talk about safety, I think the real question is, who are we protecting from whom? Who is really being protected by our FDA? More and more of us are coming to the conclusion that the only people really being protected are the big executives of the large pharmaceutical companies. We ask ourselves, why are Americans, the world's best customers, paying the world's highest prices? And the answer is, because we are a captive market and because our own FDA literally puts a border around our country and will not allow Americans to have access to those drugs.

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As I mentioned, we import thousands of tons of food every day from all over the world. Last year, for example, we imported 318,000 tons of plantains. People say, well, somebody might get into these Fed Ex packages and get inside the tamper proof packages and somehow substitute counterfeit drugs, but again, the evidence of that is anecdotal at best, and if we stop and think just for a moment that if terrorists really wanted to get at the broad base of the American consumers, would they really resort to trying to break into UPS offices, Fed Ex offices to get into those packages and somehow tamper with those pharmaceuticals? I think common sense tells us that that simply is not going to happen.

We as Americans should be willing to pay our fair share for all of the costs of the research and development for the miracle drugs that are coming out of the pharmaceutical companies that help save lives. We ought to be willing to pay our fair share, but we have to be willing to say that it is time for us to say, yes, we will subsidize sub-Saharan Africa, but we are going to stop subsidizing the starving Swiss.

I am a Republican. I believe that the word "profit" is actually a good word. There is nothing wrong with the word "profit," but there is something wrong with the word "profiteer," and I am delighted that we have people like Kate Stahl who will stand on the shoulders of the sons of liberty who threw tea in Boston Harbor because they saw something clearly was unfair, and they were not going to take it anymore. She represents literally millions of seniors and consumers here in the U.S. who are saying enough is enough, we are not going to take it anymore.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FRANKS of Arizona). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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