

drugs simply do not hold. They did not hold when the United States Government needed them, and they do not hold today when our seniors and others are forced to go to Canada to get life-saving medications.

This system is not some great beyond that we do not know. Today in Europe the system of parallel trading exists, free trade where people in Germany or France or England or Ireland buy medications wherever they need them in Europe. That system exists, and it is the most competitive market in the pharmaceutical industry.

What I am suggesting, what others in bipartisan fashion have passed in July, the legislation known as market access, are suggesting is allow the United States to participate in that market access. Allow the barriers to come down, allow the market to organize and properly manage itself and prices in the United States would come down, rather than allowing a 40 to 50 percent disparity between the prices in Canada and Europe between the United States. That is what would happen if we passed this legislation today.

For too long, if we take a look at it, in Families USA, the 50 most commonly used drugs by our seniors have risen 3½ times the rate of inflation. Between 2000 and 2003, seniors' expenditures on prescription drugs increased by 44 percent.

The costs of medications are too expensive. Eli Lilly and the other pharmaceuticals are limiting the sales to Canada in an attempt to cut off the seniors. And what does the United States Congress do and what does the United States Senate do? When they passed a prescription drug, when it came to the issue of price and affordability, the Congress did nothing. And so people are forced to take action in their own hands and go to Canada.

We should not turn our grandmothers and our grandfathers into drug runners, filling up prescription bags for people that live in the housing centers with them. We can deal with the issue of cost. Allow the free market system to work and allow choice to exist and prices would come down here in the United States.

For too long the American people have been forced to subsidize the starving French and Germans. We should give them competitive prices, give them choice, allow the free market to work; and we will finally get the prescription drugs people need and deserve.

WASHINGTON WASTE WATCHERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHERWOOD). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my colleagues, and in particular the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART), as a vigilante for the Amer-

ican taxpayer. In the 10 short months that I have been a Member of Congress, I have been appalled by the waste, fraud, and abuse that I have found to exist within the Federal Government.

As a member of the Washington Waste Watchers and of this body, I believe it is my duty to bring to the public's attention instances of fraud, waste, and abuse. It not only steals from taxpayers but also from the beneficiaries who truly need the benefits.

I have been given the honor of serving on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. In this position, I exercise oversight responsibilities over the second largest agency in the Federal Government. The VA is a laudable institution with lofty goals and worthy intentions. However, as evidenced by long wait times suffered by many veterans, not only in my district but in other districts as well, it has not always flourished under the best management practices. Again this year, the GAO placed the VA on its high-risk list for fraud, waste, and abuse. Here are but a few examples of fraud and waste that I will discuss that happened in the VA where we stood to lose over \$130 million to unscrupulous felons.

They have been vulnerable to this because of poor management practices and loose accounting standards. Three VA employees, two in my home State of Florida and one in New York, embezzled nearly \$1.3 million by exploiting internal weaknesses in the VA benefit program. With this money one employee purchased a Mazda Miata, a Mitsubishi 3000 GT, and two engagement rings.

After a review was conducted as a result of this crime, auditors uncovered 136 other cases of potential fraud or mishandling of veterans' benefit checks from offices in St. Pete, Florida, and St. Louis, Missouri, alone.

We need to seek out this fraud, not just believe that the solution is to raise taxes and turn our backs on fraud, waste, and abuse.

The VA has also identified approximately 7,000 possible cases of individuals who may be receiving benefits intended for deceased veterans. The VA estimates that they netted nearly \$21 million over 5 years by identifying these cases. Can you imagine that they are continuing to pay for veterans who have passed away?

For more than 7 years, nearly 400 veterans actually received VA educational benefits even though they did not attend class. The veterans had a great scheme going with the instructor who falsified their attendance. Nineteen defendants have been convicted in this scheme, and the government has recouped over \$4.5 million.

Lastly, the Department's Inspector General estimated that roughly 13,700 veterans have been paid about a million dollars nationwide and that the Department has no systematic method to identify these people who are prisoners. Prisoners should not be paid veterans benefits.

Here are a few recent examples of waste within the VA: the Veterans Administration keeps an excess inventory of medical supplies totalling \$64 million, or 62 percent of its \$132 million inventory. An example is at four pharmaceutical facilities surveyed, the Inspector General found 48 percent of the inventory was actually in excess.

The VA medical supply procurement practices are also questionable because very often they pay more for medical supplies than the market price, and here is an example of that. During a 6-month period, seven out of 10 VA medical centers that purchased standard powder-free surgical gloves failed to use the established FFS contractor and overpaid an open-market vendor by 28 percent. This error in disposable gloves alone cost the taxpayers \$34,000.

As evidenced by these instances of fraud and abuse which are only the tip of the iceberg within the VA and other Federal agencies, it is imperative that the culture in Washington change.

Instead of the knee jerk reaction to raise taxes to fund programs or to create mandatory spending entitlements (the answer favored by Democrats) we must look into the wasteful spending practices the result from unchecked bureaucracy!

It is my deepest hope that by highlighting these abuses and bringing them to the attention of the American taxpayer, the VA will continue to take corrective action under the leadership of Sec. Principi and respect that the money that they are spending is the people's money. Not their own.

Waste, fraud, and abuse throughout the federal government is decades old, and Republicans—led by Budget Chairman NUSSLE and Speaker HASTER—are working to eliminate the culture of waste that has existed in the federal government.

As a Republican, I will work to reduce wasteful spending in the government and protect your tax dollars.

CONSTITUENT LETTERS REGARDING IRAQ WAR

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, about 170 or so years ago, John Quincy Adams came to the House floor night after night reading letters from his constituents because the conservative leaders of the House of Representatives in those days passed a rule prohibiting banning the debate and discussion of slavery in the United States. He read letters mostly from women in his Massachusetts district protesting the cutting off of debate, the fact that conservative leadership in Congress simply did not want this discussed.

Today, 165 years later, I have come to the House night after night reading letters from any constituents, talking about corruption in the Bush administration, talking about the money we are spending on reconstruction in Iraq, talking about the billion dollars a week, a third of it from private contractors, money that goes to the