

coverage for Medicare at the same time the administration reduces hospital reimbursements, denies beneficiaries information on coverage and limits rights of appeal on denial of coverage. All are part of a concerted effort to turn Medicare into essentially a Third World health program for seniors. They want to privatize Medicare.

The story with Medicaid, child care, Head Start, and job training is little different. They propose to turn these programs into block grants for States, offering less and less funding. They say they are offering Governors flexibility; but considering the fiscal crises our States are experiencing, this becomes flexibility only in deciding how to cut services, the flexibility to decide which recipients to jettison.

As a Member of the Committee on the Budget, I was privy earlier this year to witness Republicans on the committee taking the breathtaking step of instructing other congressional committees to cut Federal mandatory programs by \$98 billion, in effect an instruction to reduce benefits and to limit eligibility. If it had been successful, it would have forced the government to cut funding, but not to end the commitment that we have in each of these areas.

So although America has committed itself to helping disabled veterans, to providing loans for college education, to offering school lunches to children and providing school assistance, housing and health care to families, the government would have been forced to breach those commitments and those contracts.

Now as we near the appropriations end game, we are seeing the impact of these budgetary sleights of hand. For example, last week we saw the imminent privatization of 69 air traffic control towers. This despite the fact we have the most productive and safest air traffic control system in the world.

Or "worker efficiency studies" at Department of the Interior designed to justify the shift of public jobs to private corporations, the results of which studies have been dubious, to say the least. We have spent \$16 million in outsourcing studies at the Bureau of Land Management that have generated \$600,000 in savings; \$18.6 million in outsourcing studies at the Forest Service that found that 47 out of 1,000 jobs studied should be handed over to private contractors. The only waste of public funds found in these studies was their own price tags.

And these are but two examples of Republicans seeking to establish that citizens cannot depend on public commitments—even ones that embody America's shared values about service to country, opportunity and help for those most in need.

The time has come to call them out on this bait-and-switch maneuver—to fight this initiative and promote the capacity of our country to act together on our shared values. And so I look forward to further special orders in the coming days and weeks on this subject, and invite colleagues on both sides of the aisle to

join me in this discussion. I think it will be a very enlightening one, indeed.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue over the next several days and several weeks to talk about how this administration and this majority is not about cutting one program after another, but, in fact, starving the Federal Government of the resources it needs in order to meet its public commitments.

CUTTING BENEFITS FOR VETERANS

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

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, soon we will be observing Veterans' Day in our Nation; and there will be parades, pictures will be taken, and flowery speeches will be made. But I want to just point out to my colleagues here in the House and to those who may be watching what the record is in terms of veterans and veterans funding and veterans health care.

In 2002, the Veterans Administration decided that they were going to raise the cost of a prescription drug that a veteran would have to pay from \$2 to \$7 a prescription. At the time I thought that was outrageous, because many of the veterans that I represent take 10 or more prescriptions a month; and I felt like that was an unnecessary burden, financial burden, to place upon our veterans.

But there is a pattern of actions that have been taken by this administration that I think I would call shameful as far as the treatment of veterans is concerned, because following this increase in the cost of a prescription drug, the VA issued a gag order. They literally changed VA policy. They sent out a memo that went out to all the health care providers across our country, the doctors and nurses and social workers who work in our VA clinics, and they forbade them to continue to proactively inform veterans of what benefits they were legally entitled to receive. The memo was very specific. It told these health care providers that they could no longer participate in a community health fair, they could no longer send out newsletters informing veterans of the benefits that they were entitled to, they could no longer make public service announcements.

Now, think of that. Here is this agency of the Federal Government, under this President, an agency that is supposed to be looking out for the welfare of veterans, literally forbidding the health care providers in our VA facilities from informing veterans in a proactive manner of the benefits they were entitled to receive under the law.

Well, not long after they issued this gag order, the VA made a decision that they were going to exclude an entire group of veterans from VA health care. They called this new category of veterans Priority 8. You can be a Priority 8 veteran and be a combat-decorated

veteran; but if you have an illness that is not service-connected and if your income is deemed to be too much, and in this case it can be as little as \$24,000 a year, you are told by the VA, you are out of here. We do not want you coming to us for medical care. You are excluded. You are a Priority 8 veteran. Pretty pathetic. All of this is happening, by the way, under the Presidency of George W. Bush.

Then in January the President sent his budget to the Congress, and in his budget he asked that the cost of a prescription drug be increased from \$7 to \$15 a prescription. Think of that. At a time when we were getting ready to send our young men and women into war, the President wants to increase the copayment for a prescription from \$7 to \$15. His budget also asked that a new first-time enrollment fee be imposed upon veterans, Priority 7 and 8 veterans, an enrollment fee of \$250.

You can see the pattern. It is a pattern of neglect and, I believe, abuse of veterans.

Then we could talk about the disabled veterans tax. The country is becoming aware that if a veteran has served 20 years, he or she is entitled to a retirement benefit; and if they are injured as a result of their military service, they are entitled to disability benefits, but they cannot receive both.

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But they cannot receive both. Now, if they were in any other part of the Federal Government, they would get both. But if you are a veteran, for every dollar in disability benefit you get, you lose a dollar in pension. In other words, veterans are being required to fund their own disability compensation. We tried to correct that in the House and Senate, but the President put out a veto threat that if this was in the bill, if this correction was in the bill, he would veto it.

Then there is a matter of VA funding for this year. It is \$1.8 billion short of what this House promised. We need \$1.8 billion additional dollars in VA funding simply to maintain the current level of VA health care services, but the Republican leadership and the President say no. So the Senate, just last week, passed an amendment to increase VA funding, not by the full \$1.8 billion, but by \$1.3 billion, and they wanted to take it out of that \$87 billion that is being provided for Iraq. The same day, the White House put out a statement saying they oppose this.

I think the veterans of this country are coming to understand that they are being treated in a shabby and a shameless manner.

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

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