

authors decided to cut corners by barring 3.9 million seniors living at or near poverty from receiving low-income prescription drug assistance.

Under the deal described this week-end, a senior earning \$8,000 a year may still be required to pay as much as \$2,500 to \$3,500 for coverage. That is not protection, Mr. Speaker. It is a cruel joke.

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. NORTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

FALSE PROMISE FOR AMERICA'S SENIORS

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

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, after years of talk about the need to help our seniors with the high cost of prescription drugs, it appears that sometime this week, or perhaps this weekend, this Congress will be voting. They will be voting on a bill that is nothing more than a false hope and a false promise for America's seniors. In fact, Max Richmond, the head of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, a nonpartisan, not bipartisan, but a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, has been quoted as saying, "Have you ever heard of Medicare fraud? Well, this Republican prescription drug bill is Medicare fraud."

Let me tell you why. As I see it, there are three major problems with the bill. Problem number one: the Republican leadership actually had the nerve to put language in the bill that says the Federal Government shall be prohibited from negotiating with the big drug manufacturers to bring down the high cost of medicine. That is in the bill. Then they call it a seniors bill.

Problem number two is the prescription drug plan will be privatized. And what is worse than that is the rest of Medicare could very well be privatized

by 2010 under this bill. Insurance is about spreading the risk. When our homeowners policy comes due, sure, we complain; but when you think about the fact that they will replace everything in our house and build us a new house if something happens, it is fairly reasonable, the premium we pay. And why is that? When is the last time you saw a home in your neighborhood burn down or get blown away? It does not happen very often. Insurance is about spreading the risk.

Well, with seniors there is no risk to spread. Seniors require a lot of medicine and a lot of health care to either get well or to stay healthy. That is why we created Medicare 38 years ago.

So why do the Republican leadership and the big drug manufacturers want to privatize the Medicare prescription drug benefit? Well, let me tell you why. You hear about how prescription drugs are less expensive in other countries. It is true. I did a survey about a year ago where I compared the price paid by seniors of the five most commonly used brand-name drugs in my district with seven other countries. And guess what we found: seniors in my district pay on average 110 percent more than seniors in these other countries.

Now, why is that? Because America is the only industrialized Nation in the world where people go without health insurance; 43.6 million of them today, 10 million of them are children and the rest of them, for the most part, are people that are trying to do the right thing and work jobs, but they are working the jobs with no benefits.

In other countries everybody has health care. And in other countries they tell the big drug manufacturers if you want your medicine, your brand in our country, you are going to give us a discount. And they do. And the drug manufacturers and the Republican leadership know good and well that if we have 40 million seniors under one plan in America, that we too will demand those kinds of discounts to help offset the cost of this program.

So they want to privatize the plan and spread seniors out over about 100 plans and have 100 different insurance companies knocking on your door and calling and sending mail to your mother or dad or grandfather or grandmother all trying to sell them, what? Exactly the same plan. Privatization will not work.

The third big problem with this is it is not really a meaningful benefit. Most people who are fortunate enough to have a private health insurance company, and every plan is a little different, but most people who are fortunate to have private health insurance, well, the first \$3,500 worth of medicine they pay about \$700 out of pocket. Under this Republican prescription drug plan, on the first \$3,500 worth of medicine, seniors are going to get stuck with \$2,600 of it. All this talk in Washington amounts to \$900 worth of help on the first \$3,500 worth of medicine.

You see, it is going to have a \$250 deductible. And during that time, you have got to pay the monthly premium, which they say may be \$35; but they are not real sure what it will be, it could be more. And then after \$250 up to \$2,000, Medicare is going to pay 80 percent and you pay 20 percent. That sounds pretty good. But on a \$100 prescription, once you get to the \$250 mark and you are paying \$20, what happens when you hit \$2,000? All the way up to \$3,500 you are back paying the full \$100. Medicare pays nothing. But they still bill you monthly for this premium. This is Medicare fraud. It is wrong. This is America, and we can do better than that by our seniors.

□ 2045

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. NEUGEBAUER). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. COBLE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. COBLE).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Minnesota?

There was no objection.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG MARKET ACCESS

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, I will not take the whole 5 minutes. I have been listening to the discussions about Medicare reforms, and I must tell my colleagues that some of the arguments they are making on the other side, I agree with. Some of them, I do not agree with.

I do want to let Members know that in first hour there will be a special order, and I invite Members from the Republican and Democrat and Independent parties to join us tonight and talk about the issue of market access because I think that is one thing that most Members here in the House agree on, and that is, that Americans deserve to have world class prices for world class drugs.

As the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) was just saying, in the studies that he has done, in the studies that I have done, the studies that other Americans have done, that have been done by the press and other groups, they all come to the same conclusion; and that is that Americans pay by far and away the world's highest prices,

even though we are the world's best customers.

Later on tonight, we will be talking about that issue and whether or not there is a way that we, here in the House, can exercise the will of the people and get something done on that issue before we go home for the break.

BEWARE THE GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

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

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I want to associate myself with the remarks of both my colleague, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) and also my colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) in the concern about what happened in the Medicare conference committee on prescription drugs.

It is sad that we came here to talk about a prescription drug plan for seniors, but we are actually going to take it away from them in the process. But the reason I am here tonight, Mr. Speaker, is to talk about the problem we have in our country with the unemployment.

Mr. Speaker, as we embark on what we hope will be our last week in sessions before the holiday recess, I rise to warn my colleagues about the ghost of Christmas Past, the economic mistakes that Congress and this administration have made on the eve of past holidays. Let us take time to learn from those mistakes and not recreate them.

I can say with confidence that each Member of this Chamber was pleased to hear the impressive economic growth figures for July through September. Over the past 3 years, this country has suffered through some of the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression, and it was certainly uplifting to see the reports of 7.2 percent growth in gross domestic product. While we remain optimistic about an economic rebound for the country, I, however, caution my colleagues against relying on the sustainability of this economic growth.

Economic indicators show that these figures were the result of consumer spending and a tremendous boost in the housing market. Yet with consumer spending outpacing consumer income, it is clear that spending cannot fuel our economic growth indefinitely. Let us remember our reaction to similar news in 2002. After months of job losses and a dismal economic growth, the country boasted growth of 5 percent in the first quarter of 2002. Despite our optimism, however, job losses continued and the next quarter yielded a 1.3 percent growth.

This time last year we were celebrating third quarter growth of 4 percent, and like today, entering the holidays with high hopes. Needless to say, our hopes were dashed and the country has since endured the worst job condi-

tions in 20 years. These are our ghosts of Christmas Past, the flurry of mistaken optimism that failed to deliver on its economic promises.

Like the optimism of Christmas Past, this recent economic growth belies the fact that our manufacturing sector has cut jobs for the 39th straight month. My State of Texas, with 1.6 million lost jobs, ranks third in the amount of manufacturing jobs lost since September of 2000. While the country may be making modest gains in employment, 6 percent of America's workers are still unemployed. Almost one-quarter of these 8.8 million people have been out of work for more than 6 months. These figures do not even count the discouraged workers, 462,000 Americans who have completely given up looking for jobs and are no longer on our unemployment roles.

Fortunately, many former unemployed workers have found jobs, but we must examine the kind of jobs they are turning to; 4.8 million Americans work part-time, but only because they cannot find full-time work, and many of these workers are former engineers, former computer technicians who previously earned up to \$60,000 a year, but now must settle for \$7.50 an hour at a retail store.

No amount of economic statistics can hide the realities that these people face. Our unemployed workers are hurting. Our unemployed families are draining their savings to survive. And this Congress holds in its hands the ability to extend their unemployment benefits.

Let me remind my colleagues that the holiday season is the time of the year when we give thanks for our blessings and extend our hearts to the less fortunate. Last year, that important lesson must have been lost on the majority's leadership, because Congress packed up for the year without extending unemployment benefits.

That is right. Congress left town to enjoy the holidays and in doing so, left America's unemployed workers in the cold.

Mr. Speaker, this year is no different. Unfortunately, if we do not act soon, the Ghost of Christmas Past will be forced to remind us of the tremendous mistake we made by withholding these benefits last year. Even Scrooge learned from his mistakes.

I implore the administration and my colleagues to let us take a hard, realistic look at our economy and make sure that any recovery helps the Americans who have been most hurt by this downturn, and above all, let us pass the extension of the temporary unemployment benefits before we adjourn for the holidays.

It is the right thing to do for our economy and for America's unemployed.

IRAQ PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentle-

woman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, the Coalition Provisional Authority which is the title of the American authority overseeing the reconstruction of Iraq, and the Bush administration which created it, are openly dissatisfied with the stories the media has chosen to broadcast regarding the United States' role in Iraq. In fact, they say the news media too often covers the negative events that occur in Iraq, but rarely reports any positive happenings there. They even pressured reporters to find the so-called good news in Iraq or lose access in an attempt to manipulate the stories coming out of Iraq.

Let us keep in mind that over 400 American soldiers have died in Iraq since the start of the war in March. That is more than 11 brave young men and women killed each week. It is hard to find the good news when our sons and daughters keep coming home in body bags. And it is exceptionally insulting to the families of these victims to complain about media bias at the same time four helicopters have been destroyed by enemy fire over the last 2 weeks.

The situation in Iraq is getting less safe for our troops, not safer. In addition to the 404 troops killed in action, over 2,000 have been wounded and another 7,000 have been evacuated for noncombat medical conditions. And yet, the President continues to complain about media bias. So what has the White House decided to do about the quote/unquote "unfair reporting" by the media?

Why, bypass that very media, of course. The President's handlers plan to influence public perception by creating a government-run broadcast operation to provide American news agencies unfettered access to the real stories in Iraq. This broadcasting system which the administration unofficially refers to as C-SPAN Bagdad will run via satellite 24 hours a day. C-SPAN Bagdad. More like American Al-Jazeera, the media giant that reports to the Arab world in a very biased fashion.

The White House is increasingly aware, of course, that President Bush's fate in the upcoming 2004 election is directly linked to the progress of the war in Iraq. So bypassing the third-party national media allows the Bush administration to mold public perception of the war effort. I think our country's founders would be ashamed to know that at the same time hundreds of our soldiers and thousands of Iraqi civilians are dying, President Bush is thinking about the chances for reelection. That is nothing short of appalling.

But equally appalling is that the American taxpayer will finance this shameful propaganda machine. That is right. The administration is directing money from the \$87 billion emergency supplemental spending bill that Congress approved last month to help pay