

I get letters from countless people who have lost their health care coverage and are wondering where they can turn for the needed care or how they will once again be able to get coverage, given a preexisting condition.

I get letters from young mothers who spend sleepless nights worried that the rising health care premiums are fast becoming unaffordable and they might soon join the ranks of America's 45 million uninsured.

I get letters from parents, frustrated that their children's treatment for a mental illness is not covered by their insurance.

I get letters from parents of children with diabetes who cannot believe that their own government's restrictive stem cell policy is standing in the way of a possible cure.

So when asked, "Are we better off now than we were 4 years ago?" the answer is a resounding no. But if these personal stories are not enough proof for my colleagues, let us look at some recent statistics.

Today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, a record-breaking 45 million Americans do not have health insurance coverage. Millions more are underinsured. This is the highest level of uninsured in our Nation's history, and it grew by 5.2 million people over the past 4 years.

Health care costs have continued to skyrocket during the last 4 years as well. The prices for prescription drugs have seen double-digit increases in the last 4 years.

The average family's share of health insurance premiums has risen by almost \$1,000 in the last 4 years, a shocking 57 percent increase. In fact, just recently, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that health insurance premiums rose again between 2003 and 2004, the fourth straight year of double-digit increases.

While health care costs have been growing, the percentage of Americans receiving health care coverage through their employers has dropped.

What has been the Republican response to this health care crisis of rising numbers of uninsured and rising costs? Unfortunately, the Republican response has been to put forward the same old proposals as they have in years past: tort reform, association health plans, the health savings accounts, proposals that study after study have shown to be ineffective in holding down health care costs and also ineffective in providing coverage to the uninsured.

Republicans have ignored the pleas of our seniors, calling on us to stop skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs, and have instead created a prescription drug benefit in Medicare that does more to help drug companies than it does to help senior citizens.

The Republicans have failed to stop \$1.1 billion in State child health insurance program funding from being taken from the States, funding that could have been used to provide health insurance to 750,000 children in America.

Given this dismal 4-year track record, it is obvious that we need a new approach to address this health care crisis, one that would truly control costs and expand access.

I join my fellow Democrats in telling America that we are ready to lead in a new direction, one that would make quality health care affordable and available and assure health care security for every American.

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

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

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I request to address the House for 5 minutes out of turn.

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

There was no objection.

DEMOCRAT NOMINEE FOR PRESIDENT CONTINUES TO DEBATE WITH HIMSELF

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

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, as I contemplate the debate from last week, I realize that again the Democrat nominee for President, Mr. KERRY, continues to debate with himself.

I was very amazed to learn throughout the debate that he was talking about the need for multilateral action, until it came to the one circumstance where we are engaged in multilateral action in which he felt we should go back to bilateral action. Now, that is, of course, in the case of Korea, and we found that the Mainland Chinese have been very, very effective at working with us to back the North Koreans down from the bluster and the rhetoric that they have thrown in front of the world stage for the past couple of years. Amazingly, in that circumstance, Mr. KERRY wants the Chinese to be quiet, and he wants the U.S. to go back to bilateral negotiations with the North Koreans.

What that accomplishes is to give the North Koreans standing which they have not had in the past 2 years under the Bush doctrine. We give a terrorist state, a state that is starving its own people, a state that is incapable of making the changes in the government that are required to bring the nation into this century, and he would give them standing while moving the Mainland Chinese and our other allies off to the side.

He did not explain that, and it was in complete contradiction with every-

thing else he brought up during the debate. So, again, we find that the gentleman from Massachusetts continues to debate himself.

I contemplated also his need for a global test. From my own perspective, when the President says that we will not ask permission to defend America, that is the clarity and plainness that most Americans want, and so this global test for me is fraught with questions. Which test would we apply? Which of our allies? Would it be France? We want France's approval before we go and do some action that would prevent attacks on U.S. citizens here on American soil? Again, I have very deep questions about the gentleman from Massachusetts' plan.

One of the most stunning things that I watched in the debate, Mr. Speaker, was the assumption that Mr. KERRY has to sell, and that is, that the war in Iraq is a mistake. He says, on the one hand, it is a mistake, and on the other hand, he is going to win it. But I will tell my colleagues, if you convince enough people in this country to vote for the gentleman who says it is a mistake, those people have to believe the war is a mistake because much of his campaign is based on that presumption and that willingness to change the course in this country; but if he convinces the Americans that it is a mistake, how then is he going to turn on his heels against the will of the American public who has sided with him and then win the war?

Mr. Speaker, I would say that he has no intention of winning the war, that instead he is going to go to those allies who say that the war is a mistake, whether it be Syria, whether it be France, whether it be Russia, whether it be any of the nations who were involved in the Oil-For-Food scandal that took \$10 billion out of money that should have bought food for hungry Iraqis, and he would go to them and ask them their opinion for this global test that he has suggested.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that within weeks the gentleman from Massachusetts would unilaterally pull out of Iraq, leaving all of our allies in that region in very deep distress.

If the United States pulls out of the Middle East, I think that we stand to lose our friends, the Saudi Arabians; our friends, the Kuwaitis; the Jordanians. I think Pakistan would be at risk. I think Syria would be at risk.

I think that the gentleman from Massachusetts has not clearly contemplated the effects of declaring that this war is a mistake and being willing to ridicule our friends, being willing to ridicule the prime minister from that war-torn region who is putting his neck on the line every single day, and the gentleman from Massachusetts declares him to be a puppet.

We have seen in Pakistan the President, Musharraf, has twice just barely escaped assassination attempts. That region is very unstable, and we have one of the candidates for President of

the United States who is willing to say that this coalition, these partners of ours, are bribed and coerced. Where is he going to find the people to become a part of this multinational cooperation when he makes those kinds of statements?

I think that the gentleman from Massachusetts has ill-thought-out his words, has ill-established a doctrine and stands the chance of ruining America's hopes for world peace.

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

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

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, I would like permission to speak in place of my colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL).

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

There was no objection.

HEALTH CARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mrs. CAPPS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, as we come to the end of another Congress, as the country stands ready to pick a new President for the next 4 years, it is appropriate to ask is America better off today than it was 4 years ago.

In terms of health care, the answer is clearly no. Since 2001, as the economy has weakened, the cost of insurance has risen. These two factors have increased the number of uninsured Americans. There are now over 5 million more Americans without insurance than at the beginning of the Bush administration. That is right, 5.2 million more.

In 2004, insurance premiums went up 11 percent, and at the same time inflation and, more importantly, workers' wages have gone up by less than 3 percent. This unaffordable increase comes on top of an increase of almost 14 percent in 2003, 13 percent in 2002, almost 11 percent in 2001. Each of these increases far outstrips pay raises. So in that time, a family's share of health insurance premiums have gone up \$1,000, a whopping 57 percent.

With such a weak economy and without sufficient increases in wages, these increases are devastating to a working family; but this administration, this congressional leadership have not done a thing to help. In fact, they have made it harder to help people struggling with the high cost of insurance.

Just last week, the administration took over \$1 billion in unused chil-

dren's health insurance funds away from the States.

□ 2045

This money could have easily been redistributed to shore up State programs and to expand coverage. And despite the continuing State budget crises, the administration has refused to grant more fiscal relief.

These actions and the refusal of the administration to put more funding into Medicaid have put unbelievable pressure on States to cut back their insurance programs. In 2004, 19 States cut benefits. Twenty have increased copayments. In 2003, 18 States cut benefits and 17 increased copayments. And as of right now, nine more States plan to take these steps in the coming year. This is all happening because of the administration's refusal to help.

In addition, under the President's watch, prescription drug prices have skyrocketed. The administration did nothing to reduce these prices or to help people pay for them. Last year, the Republican leadership and this President shoved a Medicare bill through the House in the dead of night. That bill, written by the prescription drug and private insurance companies, offered a sham prescription drug benefit.

The President and congressional leadership blocked Medicare from negotiating lower prices for Medicare beneficiaries in the bill, and the President has fought efforts to allow seniors to import cheaper prescription medications, despite bipartisan support. Their answer was the so-called prescription drug discount card, which has proved to be a failure.

Reports done by the House Committee on Government Reform, and I did them in my district, have exposed that the prices with these cards can be higher than Canadian drug prices, and they are much higher than the prices seniors could get if Medicare would negotiate on behalf of America's 40 million seniors.

But this is not even the worst of it. The President's bill has set the stage to privatize Medicare. It shovels an additional \$46 billion to managed care companies in order to push seniors into HMOs. And the President has asked seniors to pay for that by increasing their own premiums by 17 percent. The media reports that the administration is hiding bigger premium increases down the road.

It seems pretty clear to me that America is not better off than it was 4 years ago. Democrats want to lower the cost of health insurance for small businesses through a new tax credit. We want to extend health insurance coverage to 7½ million parents through Medicaid and CHIP, and we want to help older Americans who cannot afford to purchase health insurance so they can buy into Medicare.

Democrats have a New Partnership For America's Future, one that ensures our security and lays the foundation

for a strong and prosperous economy, and that is what we are fighting for.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MURPHY). 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.)

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to proceed with my 5 minutes at this time.

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

There was no objection.

SOCIAL SECURITY

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

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, looking forward to 2005, there are few more important issues for government than overspending and overpromising. Unless we get spending under control, government will lose the ability to do much of anything else except manage our indebtedness. Already we pay nearly \$300 billion a year, approaching 12 percent of our total expenditures for interest on the debt. That is \$300 billion a year on interest. And interest rates are going up, our debt is going up, and that cost is rising very rapidly.

This fight will influence the kind of lives that our kids have. Why do we not pay attention to the problems of the insolvency of Social Security and Medicare? Why do we not look at the problems that this kind of overpromising and overspending are going to have on the economy of the United States? The challenge facing Congress will be to restore our reputation for fiscal restraint.

The Federal Government is now running the largest budget deficit in our history, which is estimated to be \$574 billion for the fiscal year that just ended September 30, and we will soon have to increase the \$7.384 trillion statutory debt limit in order to accommodate this borrowing, which our children and our grandchildren are ultimately going to have to assume the responsibility for.

I cannot think of harsher words than maybe unconscionable, maybe too interested in our political futures to do what is necessary to deal with these tough problems. This overexpenditure, the debt, is only a small part of the total problem. Overpromising is the larger issue, and that deals with the chart I have before us tonight, and that is this massive unfunded liability.

The deficit and debt, unfortunately, are only the beginning of our financial