

thirds of the time you call 1-800 Medicare you get correct information.

That means one-third of the time you do not. So we are not penalizing the administration for not being able to get this law up and running correctly. Nobody has lost their job over that. But we are going to penalize seniors who have not made up their mind because of this confusing law, because they were getting wrong information from the 1-800 Medicare number that we talk about on the floor.

We are going to charge seniors as much as a 7 percent penalty for the rest of their lives if they do not get this together by November.

Mr. Speaker, a Republican pharmacist in my district said to me, he said, "President Bush might as well have handed a blank legal pad to the drug industry and said write this new Medicare law."

Congress and the President wrote a confusing plan at the behest of the HMOs and the drug companies, and then Congress and the President are saying that seniors should have to pay a penalty, seniors in Cincinnati and Dayton and Columbus and Toledo and Mansfield and Chillicothe and all over my State and all over Connecticut and all over Georgia and all over Minnesota have to pay a penalty because the drug industry and the HMOs and those lobbyists in Washington got this Congress to write a law like that. That hardly seems fair.

Mr. Speaker, I would just ask my friends on the other side of the aisle, please ask President Bush to extend this deadline so seniors do not have to pay a penalty for this very confusing new drug law.

Mr. DEAL of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of our time.

Mr. Speaker, this has indeed been an interesting debate. Here we are having people who did not vote for the bill who for 40 years controlled this House and kept saying to seniors, we are going to provide you with a drug benefit and never delivered.

The Republicans delivered. They did not like the bill. They still do not like the bill. Now they say they do not want a deadline, but the bill that they drafted had a March 1 cutoff with penalties following that.

Ours is more generous than that. The purpose of today's debate is to simply remind seniors, this is a voluntary program. If you want to sign up you should do so before May 15.

The confusion, yes, there is confusion because there are a lot of choices out there. Our friends on the other side of the aisle said this will not work and nobody will have any choices. The truth of the matter is, there probably are maybe too many choices, but it is better to have choices than none at all.

Mr. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, rather than bringing legislation to the House floor that would actually help senior citizens get the prescription drugs they need and address some of the problems that they are having with the new drug benefit, the Republican leadership

has brought forward an "advertisement" in the form of a meaningless resolution that does nothing, absolutely nothing, to make it easier for seniors to enroll in the prescription drug plan.

Instead, they are encouraging our constituents to beat an artificial deadline and enroll in these plans without having accurate information to prevent them from enrolling in a plan that does not meet their needs.

The independent Government watchdog agency, the Government Accountability Office, recently reported that a good deal of the information that Medicare is providing on this new drug benefit is wrong or incomprehensible to the average beneficiary. For example, Medicare representatives gave an incorrect answer 60 percent of the time when they were asked to help a beneficiary find the lowest-cost plan to enroll in.

These findings also point to larger problems. Because of inaccurate, complicated, or confusing information, seniors have not been given a fair shake. Why is the House not addressing these matters?

We should be here today voting on a bill to extend the May 15 deadline and helping seniors avoid an unfair and unnecessary penalty. Instead, we have a meaningless resolution encouraging seniors to do exactly what they have been doing, which is to evaluate their options. I encourage that—so I will support the resolution. But we should be doing much more to help seniors.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. DEAL) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 802.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. DEAL of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

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

(Mrs. MCCARTHY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PRESCRIPTION DRUG DEADLINE

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take her place since she is not here.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to talk about a serious issue facing America's seniors, an issue that was just debated prior on the floor, the upcoming deadline for enrolling in the new Medicare prescription drug program.

I, like many of my colleagues, have held forums around our congressional districts to try and encourage the senior citizens to enroll in the program and to try and help explain it with the help of advisers from Medicare, from the Kaiser health care organization in my district, from the county health care offices and many others to explain the process of enrolling, the benefits, and what the seniors need to get together to do that.

But the problem is that time is going to run out on many of these seniors. There is just 5 days left to enroll in the program or face the possibility of a lifetime penalty. Most seniors do not fully understand the nature of that penalty, that that penalty will be assessed on the value of the average premium paid, and it will be assessed for the rest of the time that the senior is enrolled in the program.

It is a serious and a harsh penalty for those who may not be able to sign up, because they simply failed to understand the program and need additional time. We have been pressing the Congress and the President and the Republicans in this House to extend the enrollment deadline and to waive the penalty for the first year to give people enough time to understand the confusing and complicated program.

Instead the Republicans have brought up this resolution that was just passed here that encourages the beneficiaries not yet enrolled to enroll in the drug plan and to review carefully all of the options available to them.

Many have been trying to do that and have not been able to do it successfully to completion. I do not believe that they should be punished for that. We are talking about individuals who in many cases have other disabilities, other problems, health care problems, and it is not easy to wade through these options that confuse many of them.

This resolution does not do anything to help those individuals avoid the lifetime penalties. It does not give the Federal Government the power to negotiate in bulk for the drug companies and for lower prescription prices.

Instead of passing this resolution, I would have hoped that the Republicans would have brought forth a provision to provide real help to the beneficiaries by giving them more time to review carefully all of the options that are available and delaying the deadline until May 31.

Why, you ask, is this necessary? On April 26, USA Today reported less than 3 weeks remain for most Medicare