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House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MEEKS of New York).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
January 30, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable GREGORY W. MEEKS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

MEDICARE PART D—WASHINGTON POST'S TAKE

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago the House passed a bill to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate with drug companies on the prices of pharmaceuticals for the part D drug program, H.R. 4 was the bill.

In my district, I have heard overwhelmingly good news about the existing part D program. For a striking example, there was a letter to the editor from one of my constituents on Sep-

tember 21, 2006 in the Gainesville Sun. Mrs. Vernell James wrote this letter. She and her husband, both in their seventies, married for 58 years, wrote, quote, "Medicare part D has been a great experience for our family. Health insurance is important because it helps us stay well and live a quality life. My husband is on three different medications, so good health insurance is something we need.

"The Medicare Web site made it simple enough to choose a plan and sign up. Now that the November 15th deadline is approaching, seniors need to be thinking about which plan is best for them. We save nearly \$250 a month because of Medicare part D on our medications, and we are looking forward to continuing savings next year."

I have met this lady, and she impressed upon me how this benefit has given them healthy coverage, and more importantly, peace of mind. But don't take my word for it or the word of this lady; I found no more convincing arguments than what was recently in the two editorials in the Washington Post. One appeared November 2, 2006, and one the day after the bill, H.R. 4, passed, January 13, 2007.

Because of the prominence of this newspaper to policymakers around this town, I would like to share these editorials with my colleagues.

On what grounds does the Post disagree with the Democrat bill, H.R. 4, which involves price fixing? First, the same point that many of us may have heard on the House floor during the debate, but unfortunately not in committee because the bill failed to go through regular Democratic order. On comparing Medicare to VA, Veterans Affairs, the VA "can do this because it is free to deny coverage for drugs whose makers refuse to provide discounts. Fully 3,000 of the 4,300 medicines covered by Medicare are unavailable under the veterans' program. Restricting the list of coverage drugs

saves money, but it also reduces the quality of the benefit; 1.5 million veterans are sufficiently unhappy with the result that they opt to buy the more inclusive Medicare coverage."

Well, they are not the same creatures at all, these two programs. I have the background to know, I have been a member of the Veterans Committee for 15 years; I served on the Health Subcommittee on this Veterans Committee. In fact, I chaired the VA Health Subcommittee in the past.

Next: Why do this at all when the private insurance market is keeping premiums costs low for beneficiaries? As the Post went on to write, quote, "the Congressional Budget Office estimated this week that savings from direct negotiations would be negligible, the average monthly premium has fallen since the program began a year ago. Private insurers can do this precisely because they are free to establish formularies, but market discipline ensures that these lists are not unappealing narrow. *The insurers need to keep customers.*" Emphasis added.

Further, the Post wrote, quote, "The Democrats' stance is troubling because it suggests an excessively government-led view of health care reform. The better approach is to let each insurer offer its own version of the right balance to see whether it attracts customers, and then adapt flexibly."

I have been extolling the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program as a model for over a decade. FEHBP works well precisely because the Office of Personnel Management administering it does not micromanage the program, does not set prices. It simply sets the terms of allowable plans, and then offers Federal and Legislative branch employees, including Members of Congress and the Executive Branch, the cafeteria of options, and they go forth and they choose what is best for them.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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On November 2, the Post echoed this endorsement of consumer freedom writing, "Retirees have a choice of insurance plans with widely varying costs, and some are faced with decisions on how much to spend out of pocket. If they choose to pay top dollar for branded medicines, the incentive to invent new medicines will rise. If they prefer to save money, incentives for innovation will decline a bit. Either way, a balance will be struck that reflects broad social preferences."

My colleagues, the Democrat bill, H.R. 4, that was passed, not through the democratic process here in Congress, but put on the floor without amendments, will not help the part D Medicare prescription drug program, it will hurt it. If you don't believe it, read these editorials of the Washington Post.

VOTERS MADE A MISTAKE TRUSTING DEMOCRATS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, there is something awry in this House. You know, we have heard for the last 2 years I have been here in Congress about how if the Democrats were allowed to be in the majority, there was going to be openness, Mr. Speaker, there was going to be transparency, there was going to be bipartisanship; and yet right here the first rattle out of the box we have 3 weeks where the Republicans are not allowed any input whatsoever. Oh, we can come to the floor and fuss about it, but that is not input, there are no amendments, there are no changes that were allowed to be made. But now this week, we are beyond the 100 hours. And of course that was pretty ironic because promises, pledges, I assure you we are going to have openness, we are going to be bipartisan, well, when they saw around election time it was, gee, they had a chance of taking the majority, what did they do? Well, we don't want to keep that bipartisan promise, so let's change that. How can we do that? Oh, we will make a new promise. We will promise we are not going to keep our prior promise and we are just going to ramrod some things through in the opening days of Congress. Then they found out they enjoyed that, they liked that. Don't let them have any input. That is not right to Americans that nearly half of Americans are not allowed input into what goes on.

But this week takes the cake. Unbelievable. We have a bill that has only, as far as we can find out, had input from Congressman OBEY and Senator BYRD, it is the Obey-Byrd \$463 billion earmark. Now I have got some folks up here from my district from Lufkin, Texas; the mayor is here, the city manager. In fact, nine of my 12 full counties had never voted for a Republican

for Congress before, they are conservative Democratic counties. They don't run their counties and cities this way. They don't say the mayor is going back in the back rooms and is going to put together the budget for the next year. We are not going to have any kind of hearings, we are not going to allow any input. And here in Congress, in the past we have had review by subcommittees, and then the subcommittee hearings and taking testimony, and then we had a voting it out of subcommittee called a markup. Then we had review by the full committee. Then we had input from both Democrats and Republicans. Then we had a voting it out of committee. And then it went to the Rules Committee, and then the Rules Committee considered it. And then it came to the floor. And then there were opportunities for amendment, not on \$463 billion of American taxpayer money, no, not here. There is no subcommittee, no committee, no Rules Committee. Well, they may take it to Rules, but I am not sure about that because it won't matter. It is coming to the floor tomorrow for a vote on the \$463 billion Obey-Byrd earmark. That is not openness and transparency. I don't care how many new promises you make to break your old promises, that isn't right to the American people of my county, my county seats, Gilmer, Jefferson, Tyler, Longview, Marshall, Carthage, Henderson, Nacogdoches, Center, Hemphill, San Augustine, Lufkin; they would never run their city governments like this, they would never run their county governments like this. People would run them out of office if they tried to do what is going to be done tomorrow with \$463.5 billion of America's taxpayer dollars. That is just not right. That is not right.

You know, Democrats had kind of run the budget process in the ground, and people had enough. They saw the way Senator BYRD cost us hundreds of millions or billions of dollars building an FBI facility in West Virginia. They saw the way the earmarks got out of hand under Democrats, so they voted in Republicans in 1994. Republicans did a great job, welfare reform, bringing the budget to where it balanced. And then they got a little complacent, some of my colleagues got long in the tooth and forgot why they were there, and so we got voted out. And the Democrats said, trust us, we have learned our lessons, we are not going to let this happen again. And all I can think about over and over again is that line in Animal House where after the senior fraternity members had wrecked the young freshman pledge's car, the guy put his arm around the young freshman and said, in effect, well, you messed up, you trusted me. Well, voters trusted Democrats with the majority. And now, as we consider \$463 billion Obey-Byrd earmark that didn't have input from our friends across the aisle or Republicans, you messed up, you trusted them.

CHARLIE ALLEBACH, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) is recognized during morning hour debates for 2 minutes.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Speaker, I come here today not to speak about the great weighty issues of the day, whether it be Iraq or the budget process and procedures of the House, homeland security or any number of issues. No, Mr. Speaker, I come here today to talk about the career of a wonderful individual. You know, it was Tip O'Neill who once said that all politics is local, and I rise today to honor the career of one of our Nation's great local civic leaders, civic officials, Charlie Allebach, Jr.

Charlie has been serving the people of the Borough of Souderton, Pennsylvania, for almost 43 years. Let me say that again. That is for 43 years, he has served the people of Souderton, Pennsylvania. He first became a borough councilman in 1964—by the way, I was 4 years old at that time—he was appointed mayor in 1970, and he has been mayor ever since. But I just want you to know, too, that he has just announced his retirement.

Charlie has presided over the steady growth of a wonderful community, Souderton, Pennsylvania. If you don't know anything about Souderton, it is in the Indian Valley of Pennsylvania, Montgomery County. It has got a great tradition. The Mennonites have had an enormous influence on that area over the years, have deeply influenced the culture and tradition. There is a great sense of family and faith in that area. Souderton is an extraordinary community.

Charlie, also, I want you to know, has performed more than 2,400 marriage ceremonies, lent his time to local service organizations and has been devoted to the borough in every way imaginable.

On behalf of the people of the 15th Congressional District, I wish him the best during his retirement. We would like to keep him around in public office longer, but I understand that 40 years is a long time. We wish him the best in this richly deserved retirement.

I also ask that a copy of my remarks today be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD so that Charlie Allebach, Jr.'s career as the mayor of Souderton can be memorialized within the annals of Congress for all time and to all the people in the Indian Valley in Souderton, I know that they are perhaps watching today the proceedings of the House and I know they have such a deep affection for this man. We don't spend enough time in our lives as Members of Congress thanking and celebrating people who do things right, who enter public service because they believe in advancing the best interests of their community. They are not doing it for themselves. That is what Charlie Allebach is all about.