

good for the country as a whole. Aside from the specific policy recommendations, the Iraq Study Group helped force a moment of truth in our national conversation about the war effort. It was apparent last summer and is still truer today that with roughly 100,000 U.S. troops presently in Afghanistan, no clear end is in sight to our Nation's longest running war, at 10 years and counting. Public support for the war is at an all-time low. A national conversation about Afghanistan is what is urgently needed.

Before proposing this idea to the Obama administration, I spoke with a number of knowledgeable individuals, including former senior diplomats, public policy experts, and retired and active duty military. Many believed, all believed our Afghanistan policy was adrift. And there was a near unanimous position that an Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group was needed. Among the distinguished individuals who embraced the idea was former ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker.

Sadly, the war has remained distant for many Americans. It is rarely spoken of from the Presidential bully pulpit. In fact, a recent Fox News piece reported, "The last time Obama specifically devoted a full public speech to Afghanistan was December 9, 2009, 16 months ago, when he announced at West Point that he was sending an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to that war-torn country." And this Congress ought to be looking at this also.

Further, the war is seldom covered in great depth in the news. And yet, for the husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers, sons and daughters who have sent off a loved one in uniform, the war in Afghanistan is anything but distant. It is uncertainty and sacrifice, it is separation and worry, and many times it is life and death.

Despite my several letters to the President and other senior administration officials calling for a, quote, "vigorous, thoughtful, and principled debate and discussion among some of our Nation's greatest minds," the idea for the study group has languished.

So today, after the Obama administration has neglected this, I am introducing legislation to create an Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group comprised of nationally known and respected individuals who love their country more than they love their political party, and who would, I believe, serve to provide much needed clarity to a policy that appears adrift at best, and highly politicized at worst.

In reading "Obama's Wars," I was deeply troubled by Bob Woodward's reporting, which indicated that discussions of the war strategy were infused with political calculations. Woodward also wrote of an administration that wrestled with the most basic questions about the war: What is the mission? What are we trying to do? What will work? These are questions that demand answers. I believe that Americans of all political viewpoints can embrace this

fresh eyes approach, for it is always to our national interest to openly assess the challenges before us and to chart a clear course to success.

I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this legislation. This Congress, both political parties, cannot do what this administration is doing. We cannot ignore this issue.

HOW GOP BUDGET IMPACTS SENIORS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Pennsylvania (Ms. SCHWARTZ) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. For decades, Medicare has been a lifeline for older Americans, providing quality and affordable health care for all seniors. But this week House Republicans are proposing to strip seniors of this guaranteed benefit. The Republican budget proposal dismantles Medicare as we know it, telling seniors they are going to be on their own to find insurance no matter what the cost or how sick they are. And it slashes Medicaid coverage for seniors who need long-term care, threatening our sickest, most frail elderly in nursing homes with no care at all. This is absolutely the wrong approach to solving our Nation's budget problems.

Every day, 48 million elderly and disabled Americans across this country count on Medicare for their life-saving medications, doctor visits, and hospital care. Sixty-nine percent of people over the age of 65, and they are both Democrats and Republicans, oppose Medicare becoming a voucher program. Seniors know that changing Medicare to a voucher program means that they will no longer have access to a guaranteed set of health benefits, that the value of a limited voucher won't keep up with rising health care costs, that the voucher would become insufficient over time, and the care they need could become unaffordable, that too many taxpayer dollars will be spent on advertising campaigns and administrative costs instead of actual medical expenses.

And seniors know that privatizing Medicare means limits on benefits, obstacles to care, uncertain reimbursements, copayments for primary care or specialty care, exclusions for certain services, discrimination based on income, illness, or age, and more uncertainty if a serious illness or need for long-term care occurs. Seniors know that privatizing or voucherizing Medicare will mean that they pay more in premiums or do without. And it doesn't end there.

In addition to Medicare cuts, Republicans also want to take away Medicaid for the nearly 6 million seniors who depend on it for nursing home or long-term care. They say proudly that they will cut funding to States by \$1 trillion. This means that disabled and frail elderly Americans will be placed on waiting lists for services or have no access to care at all.

□ 1040

In Pennsylvania, my home State, nearly 40 percent of funds spent on long-term care would be at risk. This includes 62 percent of nursing home residents and 25,000 Pennsylvanian seniors who receive home health services.

And yet when Republicans had the opportunity to reduce costs while maintaining and strengthening care for our seniors, they demonized the plan, voting time and again to stop important improvements in Medicare. And they still want to repeal the law that eliminates copayments for preventive care services, that makes prescription drug benefits more affordable and improves coordination of care and health outcomes, reduces errors and reduces costs for seniors.

They want to repeal the law that curbs the growth in Medicare spending, saves taxpayers almost \$500 billion by ending overpayments to insurance companies, and extends the life of the Medicare Trust Fund for 12 years. Instead, the Republicans here in Washington want to end Medicare as we know it and put health care for American seniors at great risk.

As a senior member of the Budget Committee, I know how important it is to find solutions to reducing the deficit. To do this right, the solution must include spending cuts, tax policy reform, and economic growth.

We should not fix our budget problems by failing to meet our obligations to our seniors. Every day we hear how determined Republicans are to slash billions of dollars from the central programs because we simply can't afford it. They say we can't afford to make investments in the future. We can't afford to educate our children or fix our roads or fuel innovation or cover health care costs for seniors.

Yet in the same proposal to slash Medicare and Medicaid for millions of seniors, Republicans make permanent tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans. In the very same budget proposal where Republicans take away guaranteed benefits for seniors, they protect billions of tax subsidies to the oil and gas industry.

In the very same budget proposal where Republicans give seniors a limited voucher to pay for higher insurance premiums, they protect the Pentagon from spending cuts on unnecessary weapon systems.

One trillion dollars in tax expenditures, \$700 billion in tax cuts for the wealthy few, \$40 billion in tax breaks for oil companies, and billions of dollars to continue inefficiencies at the Pentagon—all of this spending is protected by the Republican budget. And instead, they choose to slash benefits to our seniors and our disabled Americans.

Budgets are about priorities and they're about our values. Yes, we should get serious about our Nation's deficit, but let's be sure that our priorities are right and we do not threaten our obligations to our seniors, to our children, or to America's future.

SUPPORT NATIONAL
AUCTIONEERING DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. LONG) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LONG. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor one of the cornerstones of American capitalism and my profession for over 30 years, that being auctioneering. Auctioneers sell approximately \$250 billion in assets each year in the United States, and this figure does not include the millions of transactions that occur online with online auctions.

It's estimated that there are 20,000 auctioneers in the Nation, the vast majority of which are small business owners. Auto auctions make up the largest volume of auctions, with over \$80 billion in vehicles being sold by auctioneers annually in the United States. If you drive a used car, chances are very good it's been across the auction block.

Auctions and auctioneers have existed for over 2,000 years. Auctioneering was fundamental in the creation of commerce here in the United States. Auctioneers first arrived in the United States when the Pilgrims arrived.

You go to an auction in Kalamazoo, Michigan; Branson, Missouri; Tucson, Arizona; Portland, Oregon; Miami, Florida—anywhere you go to an auction in this country, we all go by one handle, and that handle is "colonel." You can walk up to an auctioneer in any auction in the United States, you don't know that auctioneer's name, you say, "Hey, Colonel," they'll turn around and answer you.

Why "colonel"? That dates back to the Civil War in this country. After the Civil War, they needed a way to get rid of the mules and tack and things they had left over, supplies; so they did that by a matter of public auction. They nominated the Army colonels to serve as the auctioneers. Now, they didn't have any professional training as auctioneers; however, they would just say, "I'm at a dollar for this saddle, a dollar-fifty. Anyone give two dollars? Sold at a dollar-fifty." So when you hear the term "colonel," that's where it originated, back in the Civil War.

Auctioneers were instrumental in the formation of early commerce by selling crops, imports, livestock, tools, tobacco, fur, and farms. Even President George Washington was a big auction fan and an avid buyer at public auction.

For over 30 years, I had the honor of selling real estate at public auction. Did I sell depressed, distressed real estate? Once in a very great while. But I sold real estate as people's first option, not their last resort. So keep in mind, auctions could be a way to achieve the highest value in the shortest amount of time. If you've got a hot property, instead of having it listed and sold in 1 day or 2 days, put it up at public auction and see what happens.

Every day auctioneers work with banks, attorneys, accountants, busi-

nesses, individuals, and government agencies to liquidate property seized and surplus property. Auctioneers create a competitive marketplace and connect buyers with sellers every day.

The National Auctioneers Association and its members strive to advance the auction methods of marketing and upholding the highest standards of professionalism to the national public. For over 20 years, National Auctioneers Day has been observed by State and local governments.

For those reasons and more, JEFF DUNCAN, another freshman auctioneer Member of Congress here, and I want to make this, the third Saturday in April, National Auctioneers Day. We will be dropping a bill to that effect. This would heighten the awareness of people in the United States of the contributions made by auctions and auctioneers to the history of the Nation and its economy.

Auctions are the last stronghold of the competitive free market enterprise system and continue to be the most effective means of establishing a fair market value.

Also, one other thing. Being an auctioneer in Congress, the way our debt is running out of control, they find it very handy to have JEFF DUNCAN and me here in Washington. We are two of the few people that can actually keep up with the national debt:

I'm at a trillion now 2, 2 trillion dollars now 3 woodygive 3 trillion, 3 trillion bid and now 4, 4 trillion, now 5, 5 trillion dollars now six are ye able to buy 'em at 6, 6 trillion now 7, woodygive 7 trillion, 7 trillion dollars bid now 8, 8 trillion dollars now 9, 9 trillion now 10 woodygive 10 trillion dollars, 10 trillion dollars now 11, 11 trillion now 12, do I hear 12 trillion dollars, 11 trillion bid now 12, 11 trillion bid now 12 now 12 woodygive 12 trillion dollars, 12 now 13, 12 trillion bid now 13, 13 trillion now 14 woodygive 14, 14 trillion dollars now 15 woodygive 15 trillion. Sold, 14 trillion dollars.

Thankfully, Mr. Speaker, we also can say those numbers backwards; so when we get the spending under control here, I'll be back.

ELIMINATING HIV/AIDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. RANGEL. I thank you for the opportunity to greet a group of ministers that have come to the Nation's capital in order to support the resources to eliminate HIV and AIDS virus infections.

It is strange how God has made us forget the blessings that we have with good health until, of course, that health is endangered, and then we recognize that what we have depended on may be threatened or may be gone or may not even exist for the 40,000 people that don't enjoy health insurance.

But because this disease has such a stigma and because a million Ameri-

cans suffer from it, and 500,000 Americans have died from it, it has been a very costly situation in terms of providing the medication to stop the disease and to prevent death. And death is certain without treatment.

These ministers have formed, some 20 years ago, in a group that was headed by Deborah House—and today it is directed by C. Virginia Fields, and Pastor Calvin Butts from the Abyssinian Baptist Church, a landmark in Harlem, New York City, and the country—have brought together ministers from all over the country as well as the National Medical Association and other outstanding people to make people aware of the fact that this disease is not only caused by the infection of the virus, but it's caused by reckless sex, unprotected sex, actions of men that are in prison, actions that when they come home they transmit through sexual activities to their wives.

□ 1050

So to a large extent, it is the ignorance of people that has caused this disease to explode and to spread beyond the communities where it was initiated.

It has cost a lot of money in order to make certain that we control the spread of this disease, but it doesn't really take that much money to be active in making certain that people are educated about the threat of those diseases.

And that is why they come to Washington today, when there is a belief that Medicaid that provides health care for the very, very poor—that it is not in jeopardy by people who want to transfer a Federal, a national, responsibility to the States, as we find proposals coming up this week.

That is why Medicare, which is a national program, is being threatened by the idea that people can get a voucher and go out and get insurance from an insurance company. Imagine going to an insurance company, being infected with AIDS, a terminal disease, and seeing what costs the private insurance company would ask you for without Federal assistance.

So it seems to me that all people—black, white, Catholic, and Protestant—could come together in terms of answering the question, How do you treat the lesser among us? How do you treat the poor in our community? And isn't it a fact that if we reach out a hand and provide the medicine and the support for those people who are infected with HIV and with AIDS, in the longer sense what we are doing is allowing Americans to be more productive, healthy, having healthy families and healthy children so that they will be able to get an education, a decent job, and provide America with the type of talent that is so important if we are going to meet the obligations of this new age where technology is going to be so important if we're going to be competitive.

So now is the time, where these ministers have come to our Nation's Capital, perhaps to reach out to people of