

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I have a parliamentary inquiry.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Texas, Mr. GENE GREEN, yield for the purpose of a parliamentary inquiry?

It does count against his time. Will the gentleman yield for the purpose of a parliamentary inquiry?

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, we need to go ahead and go forward with it because I have 5 minutes on Medicare, and it is a concern. I would be more than happy to sit back down, if the Speaker would like to recognize a Member from the other side because I think the objection has been withdrawn.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent the gentleman yield back his time without having it charged against him in the name of decorum so we can go back and forth.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the special order of the gentleman from Texas, Mr. GENE GREEN, is vacated without prejudice.

There was no objection.

REPUBLICAN MEDICARE REFORM

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. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is an historic day. It is exciting, the plan that we are going to present on Medicare tomorrow. I am proud of the plan that we are going to present to the American people tomorrow and we will vote and pass it tomorrow. And all we are hearing from the other side is fear and scare tactics. That is sad.

For the seniors of this country, it is one of the most important issues we are facing, and all we are hearing is scare tactics and fear and, oh, my gosh, the sky is falling, the Chicken Little story. This is not the case. We have a good plan with which we all agree on so many things.

There are a lot of things we agree with on this plan. We agree, for example, that Medicare is so important that we have to do something to save it. We agree that it is going bankrupt. It is the Clinton trustees that say it is going bankrupt. We agree that next year for the first time in the history of the plan, less money is coming in than is going out. And in 7 years, the total fund is bankrupt, the part A fund. So there is no disputing that fact. We agree there.

We should agree that we do not want a Band-Aid approach, that we really want to fix the problem because the problem gets really bad in the year 2010 when the baby boomers come along. In year 2010, which is 65 years after World War II, is when the whole thing explodes. And all we are going to do is a Band-Aid approach and putting it off to another day, a major problem when the rest of us start retiring.

I think we should agree that we need to fix the plan and start working on the baby boomer problem. And we should agree on choice. What is wrong with choice? As a Federal employee, all Federal employees have a choice of plans. And all they are doing over there is to ridicule the idea that seniors should have a right to choose. I have a right to choose. Every Member has a right to choose. Every member of the Department of Commerce has a right to choose. Everybody in the Department of Agriculture has a right to choose. Why should not seniors have a right to choose?

Not only do they have a right to choose, they get to stay in the plan they are in right now. They do not have to leave that plan. They keep that plan. But why not let them have a choice? If they want to choose the medical savings account, that is their right to choose. Nothing wrong with that. Why ridicule the idea that some seniors may want a medical savings account?

Why not allow local hospitals and local doctors to go together to form their own plan? Why not allow them, give a choice. Health care is a local issue. Why not allow the groups to work together?

Why not allow HMOs and managed care programs to be offered to seniors. I do not have them in my area very much. What is wrong with giving them the right to choose? Why fight the right to choose idea? It makes no sense.

Our plan has tough waste, fraud and abuse. Who can disagree with fighting waste, fraud and abuse? They cannot get mad at us that we are not increasing copayments and we are not increasing deductibles. What is wrong with that? You have to agree with us on that.

All they want to do is start these scare tactics. They say, we are cutting Medicare by \$270 billion. Let us get the facts straight.

The next 7 years we are going to spend \$354 billion more than we spent the last 7 years, \$354 billion more than the next 7 years than the last 7 years. Let us divide that up by the number of people on Medicare. We are spending \$4,800 per person on Medicare today. We are spending \$6,700 per person on Medicare in 7 years. Now, to me it does not take remedial math, it does not take a Ph.D. in statistics to understand that going from \$4,800 to \$6,700 is an increase. It is not a cut. We are increasing spending by \$354 billion over 7 years.

Where does this idea of getting beat up on the cut come from? That is fear tactics; that is trying to scare the seniors. And that is wrong.

And then we start talking about tax cuts. What is wrong with the tax cut? It is a totally separate issue. What happens if we have no tax cuts? We get rid of all the tax cuts? What happens to Medicare? It is bankrupt in 7 years. It has no impact on it.

Medicare part A is a trust fund. The only money going in is a payroll tax and the only money going out is to pay for part A. So it has nothing to do with income taxes. So if we have no tax cut at all, it still goes bankrupt. So that is a phony issue.

Let us debate the tax cut on its own merits. And it really is a tax cut for working families in this country.

Now we talk about the hearings. We have had 38 hearings and we have listened to the American people.

I think in 5 years we are going to reflect back and say, we made a great decision tomorrow to reform Medicare.

MORE ON MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, and without objection, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. GENE GREEN, is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, let me answer my colleague's concern about the right to choose. Seniors have the best right to choose today. They can choose whatever doctor and hospital they want to. But under the plan that is going to pass tomorrow they will not have that right because they will be priced out of the market.

The cuts we have talked about. They discussed the cuts. Well, it is a cut because, if we have a growing senior population by the year 2002, and they are saying, they do not grow as fast with the improvements in that plan, then we are going to diminish the ability of seniors to be able to have access to health care.

That is what they cannot explain. Let us get down to the basics though. We will vote on a \$270 billion slowing of the growth for the year 2002 to pay for a \$245 billion tax cut. I have heard this for months that we paid for that in the spring. We have not paid for anything since the spring. There has not been one appropriations bill passed here. The one that passed was vetoed by the President. They are going to use \$245 billion over the next 7 years to balance off the cuts in Medicare growth, because there are seniors who are going to grow into it.

My dad is 80 years old. He is the growth in Medicare because he is going to need it next year. I hope he needs it in 2002. But they are not planning for it because they want to pay for a tax cut now to pay for political promises. On Monday I visited a senior citizens center in Jacinto City, TX, just outside of Houston. I was presented over 5,000 petitions that I left here this morning on the House floor from senior citizens, working families across my district. This signed their names because they are very concerned about the broad and extreme cuts that the Republicans are talking about that we are going to vote on tomorrow.

The cuts, \$270 billion, in it only fixes Medicare to the year 2006. Up until last

week they were saying they wanted to fix it to the next election. Well, our next election is long before 2006. They want to cut \$270 billion when we only need \$89 billion to fix it to the same year. Their numbers do not add up. That is their problem. They do not add up to the year 2002 because they are taking \$245 billion as a tax cut.

In the 30 years that we have had Medicare, it was a Democratic Congress overcoming Republican opposition to enact Medicare. It has been saved eight times in the past 30 years, and hopefully we will save it again for the senior citizens, that is, until tomorrow, when we vote on the Republican Medicare reform proposal.

That is a surrender of the commitment that our government made with senior citizens in 1965. The majority feels it is so important to fulfill their campaign promise of a tax cut that busts our budget. They talk about they want a balanced budget. I want one, too, but let us get our financial house in order before we worry about \$245 billion in tax cuts and throwing families back to the Dark Ages where seniors have to decide whether they want to pay for rent, utilities, food, or health care.

The worst part of their bill is that, rather than the fact that the Medicare is being cut \$270 billion, again, it is to pay for that \$245 billion tax cut. That is the outrage that people are saying. That is why they wanted to run this through with only one hearing in the House and arresting seniors who came over to testify. This plan had a lot less than the President's health care plan that most of the other side opposed. So I would hope that we would deal with it.

Tonight there is a vigil out on our Capitol steps by seniors who are raising their voice in opposition. I would hope that 30 years from now, when we celebrate the 60th anniversary of Medicare, it will be because we voted this down tomorrow. If we do not vote it down, then the President will veto it, and next year the voters in our country will recognize who is really concerned about health care for seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. BROWN], from Cleveland, who is now the American League champion.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I have had lots of town meetings in my district. I hear the anger from senior citizens and from their families about the \$270 billion in Medicare cuts in order to pay for tax breaks for the wealthy and about the Republicans idea to give people the right to choose health care plans but take away their right to choose a doctor.

What I am also hearing from senior citizens is they are particularly concerned about fraud in Medicare. The inspector general said that as much as \$200 billion, as much as \$200 billion of fraud over the next 7 years in the Medicare plan. Yet the Republicans bill actually promotes fraud, waste, and

abuse. The New York Times had an editorial called Bribes for Doctors talking about the midnight deal, that the Speaker's deal made Medicare substantially worse.

It is clear that as bad as the fraud is, it does not make sense to give tax breaks to the wealthy of \$245 billion while you are cutting Medicare \$270 billion and taking away the ability of government to fight fraud and investigate and prosecute fraud.

MEDICARE OVERHAUL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. GREENWOOD] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GREENWOOD. Mr. Speaker, earlier this evening the gentleman from California, Mr. FAZIO, made the statement that the Republicans do not want Americans to fully understand our Medicare reform bill. I would like to challenge that assertion because in fact it has been our experience and my personal experience that what we need to do is precisely make sure that Americans, particularly America's senior citizens, understand our Medicare present reform bill. When they do, they like it. And they like it very much.

That has been my experience. It was my experience this evening. I had a letter that one of my staff members placed on my desk from a 70-year-old gentleman in my district that was very upset. He had been listening to my friends on this side of the aisle. He said he was having a hard time sleeping because he and his wife had been in and out of hospital. He heard we were going to take his Medicare away. So I said to him, let us go through it one step at a time. And I said, do you like your Medicare just as it is? He said, yes, I am very happy with it.

I said, well, under our plan, you will keep your fee-for-service Medicare just as it is. And you and your wife will be able to go into the hospital and go to the doctors next year and the year after that and the year after that just as you have been now. In fact we are going to make sure that the system is there for you.

I said, we are not going to raise your deductibles. Oh, you are not? No, we are not. We are not going to raise your co-pays. You are not? I heard them say that you are. Well, we are not. What are you going to raise? Are you going to raise the portion that I pay for my part B? I said, no, we are not going to raise the portion that you pay. You pay 31.5 percent now. And you will pay 31.5 percent next year. And your friends and neighbors will pick up the other 68.5 percent next year just as they have this year.

I said that 31.5 percent is going to go up a little bit just as it did last year, the year before that. But your COLA's, your Social Security COLA will go up by even more than that, so your Social Security check that you receive next January will be bigger than the Social

Security check that you are receiving now and will receive through the end of the this year. So you are going to have more money in your pocket at the end of the day next year, when this plan takes effect, and exactly the same health care that you chose now.

We find that, when we go to focus groups, when we go to town meetings and we explain in detail this plan, the senior citizens thank us. They like it. They have nothing to fear and they know it. And if they do not know it now, they certainly will know it once the President signs the bill and it goes into effect.

Let me talk about some of the disinformation that has been difficult for us to deal with.

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Members of the minority party have stood up all night, and they stood up for weeks and weeks and weeks, and talked about Medicare cuts, and, as we have said over and over again, no one is going to cut Medicare. We are going to increase the expenditures per capita on Medicare beneficiaries by 40 percent over the next 7 years. That is a whopping increase, it is a generous increase, and it is more than enough money to restore and preserve the system and continue the same benefits package.

So we do want Americans to understand that because when Americans understand that and they understand that we are going to spend more on them in each of the next 7 years, and not less, they are comforted, and they need to be comforted because they have been told a lot of falsehoods.

We have heard people say from the other side that we are going to take away. One of the gentlewomen from the other side of the aisle said, "cutting health care," cutting health care as if a single senior citizen in this country would not have access to exactly the same health care services when our plan is in effect as it is now. Simply not true. Every senior citizen in this country will be able to stay in the fee-for-service program and get precisely the same health care benefit next year as they do this year.

Now, that is an indisputable fact that is not even subject to debate, and yet I hear Members from the other side of the aisle over and over again talk about cutting health care. I walked past the sort of ginned-up candlelight vigil outside the Capitol tonight, and I heard the minority leader of this House, the gentleman from Missouri [Mr. GEPHARDT], talk about Republicans doing away with Medicare, and I shook my head. I shook my head and thought how could a Member of the U.S. Congress utter those words knowing deep in his heart that no one in this body would ever contemplate for a moment doing that. Certainly, this Member, whose mother and father he deeply loves and whose mother and father are Medicare recipients, would never do anything to reduce their package, their benefits. We have heard