

WARNING FROM THE MEDICARE TRUSTEES

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

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to conclude the discussion that we have out here on the floor tonight. I thought it was a frank give-and-take, if you will pardon the pun, and I want to stress that I think it is important to have more discussion along these lines.

I join with my colleagues in assuring the concerns and chagrin of my colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. WELDON], who just did a superb job, was very animated, I think, very correct in his remarks in speaking about his disgust at the tactics we have seen employed by the opposition party out here on the floor whenever we have attempted to honestly discuss the warning contained in the Medicare trustees' report back to April.

Each year the Medicare trustees issue a report on the status of the Medicare trust funds. This past April 3, the disclosed Medicare will soon be bankrupt and urged Congress to respond swiftly to this crisis. I think it is important for our colleagues and constituents to understand the Medicare trustees are a nonpartisan, impartial board that reports on the status of Medicare each year. The trustees consist, as we have pointed out, of four Clinton administration officials, the Treasury Secretary, Labor Secretary, Health and Human Services Secretary, and Social Security Commissioner, and two nonadministration officials who represent the public. In other words, a majority, four out of six of the members of the Medicare trustees board, are Clinton-appointed trustees.

The trustees warned that Medicare is headed toward bankruptcy. Their report said the Medicare hospital trust fund part A, which covers hospital services for seniors, will begin to experience "increasing annual deficits" in 1996 and will be depleted in 2002. In other words, Medicare starts to go bankrupt, starts to go into the red, next year and will be completely bankrupt in 7 years.

In addition, the cost of the Medicare Supplementary Insurance Program, Medicare part B, which pays doctors' bills, has grown by 53 percent over the past 5 years. The trustees again warned, under the current system balancing the Medicare hospital trust fund for the next 25 years would require tax increases or a reduction in benefits.

The trustees' report actually stated, "Either outlays would have to be reduced by 30 percent, which would lead obviously to health care rationing for Medicare beneficiaries, or income increase by 44 percent or some combination thereof."

Mr. Speaker, as you well know, we have ruled out those two alternatives of health care rationing or a further increase in payroll taxes to top of the

payroll taxes of the 1970's and 1980's. But we have responded to the Medicare trustees' urging to act quickly to address Medicare's problems.

So we hope that we can again have an honest debate. I would say to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, using your logic, since President Clinton has finally come to the table, he has finally joined the debate, he too has proposed restraining the rate of growth in the Medicare Program and providing middle-class tax relief, by their own logic, President Clinton is proposing to, quote unquote, cut Medicare, in order to pay for a middle-class tax break. We know that is not true.

We know the scare tactics are ultimately not going to succeed with the American people. I am just concerned and disappointed that Congress and the Democrats have decided to spend all of their time and energy attacking the Medicare Preservation Act instead of joint us in saving Medicare. Their tactics distort our bill and what it would mean to senior citizens, demonstrating again why Americans are so upset with Washington, DC. The tactics are politics as usual, and it is politics at its worst, so we have already brought out tonight our bill increases Medicare spending in terms of the national average from \$4,800 per beneficiary today to \$6,700 per beneficiary in just 7 years.

The figures, again, in California are higher, \$5,000 today to roughly \$8,000 in approximately just 7 years.

Our bill expands choices to seniors. It does not increase deductibles or copayments, and the premium rate in Medicare part B stays exactly the same as the current rate. Our proposal saves Medicare from bankruptcy through the next generation, not just the next election.

Americans, Mr. Speaker, of every age are tired of the excuses and the 30-second ads. They want Medicare saved. They know that in their hearts it is the right thing to do, and they know we must do it, and that is exactly what our proposal, which we will be debating and voting on this House floor next week, October 19, that is exactly what our proposal, the Medicare Preservation Act, does.

We have an obligation to lead as the governing party in the House of Representatives, and I urge our colleagues, stop the nonstop campaigning and join us in our efforts to save Medicare. You owe that to America's seniors.

TRIBUTE TO FIREFIGHTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Ms. WOOLSEY] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, if you want to hear about some brave firefighters, make that 2,164 extremely brave firefighters, talk to the people I represent in West Marin, CA. You see, over the past week, at least 45 homes and over 12,000 acres of Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin County,

CA, have been destroyed by tragic wildfire, a fire caused by an irresponsible individual with an illegal campfire and in a non-campground.

I flew over the disaster area during the initial stages of the fire last week, and I can tell you that I have never seen anything so mighty and devastating and so tragic in my entire life. But, Mr. Speaker, the damage and injuries would have been far worse were it not for the incredible courage of firefighters from throughout the San Francisco Bay area and California, men and women who put their lives at risk to protect one of our Nation's greatest national treasures, the Point Reyes national seashore and the town of Inverness, CA.

Special praise goes to the Department of the Interior, the California department of forestry and fire protection, and the Marin County fire department. These three agencies coordinated an unprecedented fire fighting effort the likes of which you have never seen. In all, 2,164 firefighters representing 40 agencies participated in this massive effort.

In the effort to thank and honor them, I would like to submit a list of those agencies for the RECORD.

The list referred to follows:

AGENCIES THAT ASSISTED IN THE MOUNT VISION FIRE

National Park Service, Point Reyes National Seashore, Pt. Reyes.
California Department of Forestry, Santa Rosa.
Novato Fire District, Novato.
Dixon County Fire Protection District, Dixon.
Marin County Fire, San Rafael.
Vacaville County Fire Protection District, Vacaville.
Napa County Fire Department, Napa.
US Forest Service, San Francisco.
Suisun City Fire Department, Suisun.
Larkspur Fire Department, Larkspur.
Redwood Valley-Capella Fire Protection District, Redwood Valley.
San Mateo County Fire Department, San Mateo.
Ross Department of Police Services, Ross.
Oakland Fire Department, Oakland.
California Highway Patrol, Corte Madera.
California Department of Corrections, Santa Rosa.
Tiburon Fire District, Tiburon.
Corte Madera Fire Department, Corte Madera.
Salvation Army, San Rafael.
Kentfield Fire Department, Kentfield.
Department of Youth Authority, Sacramento.
San Rafael Fire Department, San Rafael.

Mr. Speaker, by air and land, these men and women worked around the clock with only a few hours' sleep. They slept on the ground in disposable paper sleeping bags. Thanks to their tireless efforts, 80 percent of the national park remains untouched, untouched by the fires, and Mr. Speaker, there were no, I repeat no, major injuries or loss of life.

Just to give you a hint of their selflessness, one resident whose home remains standing amid several others that were burned to the ground, returned to his home to find a note in his

kitchen from the Tiburon fire engine company No. 12. The note said that the firefighters had fought to save the house from the surrounding flames and that they had been successful, but they wanted to thank the homeowner because afterwards they had come in and had soda and crackers. As the resident said, when he returned home, no amount of soda and crackers will ever be enough to repay these firefighters for their heroic actions. In fact, he said that he was the one that should be thanking the firefighters, not the other way around.

I assure you, Mr. Speaker, similar stories of firefighters going beyond their call of duty to assist victims and protect homes and the park can be found throughout West Marin.

Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate National Fire Prevention Week, let us salute our Nation's firefighters. Like the constituent that I told you about, we are all forever indebted to these courageous men and women, the true heroes of the United States of America.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, let me first thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. WELDON] for organizing this special order in recognition of Fire Prevention Week.

I would also like to commend the chairman of the bipartisan Fire Caucus, Mr. BOEHLERT, for his hard work and commitment to the fire service. The over 340 Members of this body who are in the Fire Caucus, are well served by such an able and effective chairman.

Mr. Speaker, most Americans recognize that the United States has the finest fire protection in the world.

Clearly, we have made valiant strides in fire prevention and safety since the very sobering report, *America Burning*, in 1973.

Firefighter deaths in the line of duty, as well as civilian fatalities, are on the decline.

Organizations such as the National Fire Protection Association who are sponsoring Fire Prevention Week have been integral in fire education and the promotion of safety and prevention.

The U.S. Fire Administration, located in my home State of Maryland, provides the backbone of our Nation's fire safety and protection services.

This administration also trains hundreds of firefighters each year and provides the very best in fire data and information.

Mr. Speaker, although we have seen these dramatic improvements in the number of fire-related fatalities in the last 20 years, the United States still lags behind many other industrialized nations in fire safety.

Last year, 100 of our very best firefighters were killed in the line of duty. Additionally, over 4,000 civilians were killed as a result of structural, vehicle, and outdoor fires.

While we can celebrate our accomplishments in fire prevention and safety over the two decades, we must take very seriously the challenge that lies ahead.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this challenge is twofold.

First, we must recognize the tremendous public service provided by America's firefighters.

Today, there are just over one million firefighters operating out of more than 30,000 departments nationwide.

Their dedication and service allow all Americans to rest a little easier at night and feel confident that if, in the unfortunate event that there is a fire, their lives and property will be protected by an able and dedicated fire service.

These firefighters should be all of our heroes as they work exhausting shifts and take on the greatest physical and mental challenges.

I have introduced a bill along with the chairman of the Fire Caucus, Mr. BOEHLERT, which would seek to correct one of the greatest inequities in the Federal Government pay system.

Every day over 10,000 Federal firefighters around the country put their lives on the line to protect the lives and property of the American people. Under the present pay system, Federal firefighters work over 25 percent more hours per week, yet earn nearly 44 percent less per hour than the average municipal firefighter.

Simply put, I have introduced this legislation to correct this pay inequity by bringing Federal firefighters under the same pay system as all Federal employees. Although the bill will not fully close the gap, it will compensate Federal firefighters at a level closer to that of municipal firefighters.

Where we can, we must also continue to ensure that all fire fighters, volunteer, municipal, and Federal receive all of the benefits and rights that can and should be afforded to them so that we can continue to encourage the very best in America to join the firefighter ranks.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the country, whenever there is an emergency, a fire, or other type of disaster, firefighters are the first to respond. They don't simply put out fires. They provide moral support and are active and responsible members of our communities.

I rise with great admiration and appreciation for the service and dedication of firefighters throughout the United States.

Second and equally important, she must work toward a day when all Americans are educated about fire prevention and specific steps people can take to reduce fire hazards in the home and work place. The role of the U.S. Fire Administration along with States and local fire officials is crucial to this effort.

To address this issue, I have introduced a bill, H.R. 771, with Congressmen WELDON and BOEHLERT, which seeks to create a grant program, administered by the USFA, which would provide moneys to individual States and localities for the purposes of fire education and prevention.

Given that each State has different fire and safety issues and concerns, this bill will allow the USFA to focus its resources appropriately on each of the different needs.

Mr. Speaker, Let me be clear. I do not believe that the Fire Safety and Education Act of 1995 provides the entire answer to our fire prevention concerns. There must be a partnership be-

tween fire departments and organizations and the citizens of each community throughout America. What we can do is help to empower the American people to learn how to prevent fires from occurring and take greater responsibility for their own safety.

Teamwork is the key to continuing our efforts in reducing fire-related fatalities and damages.

This week is an important step in focusing attention on the successes of the past 20 years, but also the work that lies ahead. Whether through legislation on the Federal or State level, through increased training of our firefighters, and through education initiatives on the local levels, we must continue to focus on fire protection and safety.

Fire Prevention Week is a very good opportunity to focus on the fire service and these issues and I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for arranging for this special order.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. TEJEDA (at the request of Mr. GEPHARDT), for today and the balance of the week, on account of illness.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. GEJDENSON) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. SKAGGS, for 5 minutes, today
Ms. JACKSON-LEE, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. WISE, for 5 minutes, today.
Ms. DELAURO, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. GEJDENSON, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. BEVILL, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. DUNCAN) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. HANSEN, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. JONES, for 5 minutes, on October 12.

Mr. KIM, for 5 minutes each day, today and on October 12.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana, for 5 minutes each day, on October 12 and 13.

Mr. BRYANT of Tennessee, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. SMITH of Washington, for 5 minutes, on October 12.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan, for 5 minutes each day, on October 12 and 13.

Mr. MCINNIS, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. SHAYS, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. FRANKS of Connecticut, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. RAMSTAD, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DUNCAN, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Member (at his own request) and to include extraneous matter:)