

who do not have enough money, can go and get some help. But guess where they put that program to make it easy for old people? They put it down at the welfare office. They say to old people that all they have to do is go down to the welfare office and ask for some help.

Now, old people have got pride. Old people have worked hard all their life, they have taken care of themselves, they have paid their bills, they have raised their kids, they have paid their taxes and, at the end of life, when they cannot pay the deductibles on this program, they have to go down to the welfare office and ask for some help to pay for that.

Now, I proposed in the Medicare Commission something that I have been proposing before in the Committee on Ways and Means; that when someone registers for Social Security, and their income is known at that point, that when they are 65, if they do not have enough income to pay those deductibles, then they should be registered immediately in the program for help to pay for their deductibles. That was resisted in the commission. They left it down there in the welfare office. And I know senior citizens in my district who will not go down there because it makes them feel ashamed of themselves to have to go down and beg at the welfare office.

So if we are going to modernize this program and we are going to raise the deductibles and so forth, we have to make it user friendly for senior citizens who are living on less than \$15,000 a year. We cannot expect them to say, well, I think I will go down to the welfare office and get some help.

We teach people in this country to be independent, to take care of themselves. We value that as a country. And the people who we are talking about right now are the people who lived through the Depression. They brought this country back from the Depression. They took us through the Second World War and they took us through the Korean War. Now we are saying to them that they did not do enough then and so we are going to make them go and beg for some more help just because they do not have anything more than their Social Security.

From my point of view that is not a good system. And when we modernize it, we have to make this an automatic benefit for people who are not capable of paying for it.

Now, there is an issue that the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) raised, and that is this whole business of so-called means testing. "Means" means how much money we have. When we say somebody is a person of "means", it means he has money. So what some people say about Medicare is that what we ought to do is put a means test. Everybody, let us say above a certain point, should not get Medicare. They should just buy their own health insurance because they have enough money.

Now, we can say to ourselves, yes, that makes sense; why do we not do that? Well, where do we want to put that? Do we want to say that everybody who has \$100,000 in income when they are 65, that they should buy their own insurance? Well, \$100,000 is a lot of money; right? They ought to be able to handle it. Well, maybe we are a little short on dough here in the Congress so we lower the means test down to, say, 75,000; and the next year we are a little short on money and we say, well, let us take it down to 50,000; and the next year we are a little shorter and we get it lower.

The problem with the means test is that what it does, it creates two groups of people in this country, those people who get the benefit and those people who do not. I personally oppose a means test. I think if we come into this country and we pay our taxes and we participate to the best of our ability, we ought to get the program.

I feel the same way about Social Security. I do not care how much anybody has. If they paid into the Social Security system, they ought to get their money out. They ought to get their fair share out.

The reason is, and this is a principle of both Medicare and Social Security, they are social insurance programs. Just like our fire insurance we have in this country. We made the decision, I think it was in 1759, in Philadelphia, to have the first fire department. We said, we cannot save our own homes, so let us all, all of us in Philadelphia, get ourselves together, get a horse and wagon and some barrels, some water and some ladders, and if a house catches on fire, we will go put it out.

That is a social insurance system. That is what fire insurance is. Nobody wants to take advantage of that. Nobody says, well, gee, I hope my house catches on fire so I can get back some of the money that I have paid in in taxes to the fire department or to my fire insurance plan. Nobody wants to get their money back, but we have it there so that if a disaster strikes us, we have coverage.

If anybody stood up on the floor of the House here and said, I think if an individual's house has not caught on fire in the last 5 years they should not have to have fire insurance or pay any taxes for a fire department, we would think they were crazy. We would think they had lost their mind, because we know that nobody knows whose house is going to catch on fire and that is why we have this social insurance fire policy in our pocket.

Same thing is true about roads. We figured out we could not do roads by ourselves, that we had to do them as a national program. That is what Dwight Eisenhower did back in the 1950's, was to establish a national interstate system. And so we collect all the gasoline tax and we put it out there and we take care of the highways in this country.

We do the same thing with schools. We realized that in order to have a de-

mocracy, we needed to have an educated electorate, and so we have a system of schools.

Well, the same thing happened in the 1930's, when there was no money for people to live on and there were a lot of old people who had no pensions. We said we have to have a Social Security System, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt came in this room and said, we ought to have everybody have an account, and so everybody has a number. 000-00-0000 is my number. And everybody has an account. We put in our money every month, and when we get to be 65, there it is for us.

None of us knows how rich or how poor we are going to be when we get to be 65. We all hope that we will be very successful and be able to take care of ourselves without that Social Security money. But when we look at senior citizens and realize that 50 percent of senior citizens live on \$15,000 or less, which is about the Social Security benefit in this country, we realize that for half the senior citizens, when they get to the end of life, that is all they have. They did not know that when they were 15 or 20 or 25 or 40 or whatever. But they put their money in, and when they got there, they had it.

The same is true about Medicare. That is why this is such an important program. There is a fascinating fact about this whole program which I think really drives it home to me as a physician, and I have seen it. We spend 70 percent of the money on 10 percent of the people, 10 percent of the senior citizens in the Medicare program. And none of us knows whether we are going to be a part of that 10 percent. That is why we have to protect the Medicare program with a defined benefit for everyone.

SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM IN THE 106TH CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HEFLEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. MINGE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, in the last week there have been some very disturbing announcements about the status of Social Security reform in the 106th Congress, and I would like to express my severe disappointment that the majority leader in the Senate and possibly the Speaker of the House has backed away from a commitment that we ought to have here in Congress to make Social Security reform the number one priority for the 106th Congress.

I do not think that there is a Member of this institution, nor are there many in this entire country, who is not aware of the importance of addressing the financial crisis that is looming for Social Security unless we take steps to change the program and make it financially secure for the foreseeable future.

We can do this by modest changes here in 1999-2000; changes that we could implement over several years. They

would not be painful if they are implemented in such a fashion and would share the cost among a generation or more of Americans. But if we continually postpone the reform effort, it will become more expensive, more contentious, and more of a crisis situation, which will be inadequate and enormously controversial when it occurs.

I do not think it is right that we in Congress point our fingers to the White House and say the President has not provided enough leadership. We here in Congress ought to be providing leadership on our own. We should not do it for fear of criticism. Certainly that is why we are elected, to make some tough decisions. And if by voting for and implementing Social Security reform it is more difficult for us to be elected the next time around, that too is something that we should face up to.

Tragically, there will always be another election. We never will reach the millennium, so to speak, when we have a free shot at reforming Social Security or something else without the controversy that accompanies the task.

I would like to urge that the majority leader and the Speaker work together with the minority leader in this body and the minority leader in the Senate to appoint a bipartisan group to come back to this body this summer with a Social Security reform package. It is certain to have elements in it that are not acceptable to one group or another but, on the other hand, at least we would be moving ahead. Such a bipartisan group ought to confer with the White House and attempt to develop a proposal that would have the support of the President.

I do not think today is too late. I do not think that the issue has somehow subsided. Yes, Kosovo has dominated the news, but people throughout America realize the importance of Social Security reform.

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I would also like to emphasize that as we begin consideration of supplemental appropriations bills for the Kosovo crisis that we keep in mind that our historic pattern of using the Social Security surplus to pay for other programs will probably end up becoming a necessity in 1999.

Many of us on both sides of the aisle have identified this as an abuse that we can no longer tolerate. We ought to stop it in 1999. It ought to end now. No more borrowing from the Social Security trust fund for other Federal programs.

The budget resolution that we have adopted makes that point clear. Unfortunately, it is for the year 2000. Let us implement it now in 1999.

I have worked with my Republican colleague, the gentleman from California (Mr. HERGER), to propose that this practice be terminated. And I am going to be meeting with him again and proposing that we take steps that would be effective to make sure that, here in 1999, we protect this Social Se-

curity trust fund from any further raids.

We need to ensure, number one, that Social Security reform move ahead promptly; and number two, that we protect the trust fund from any further use.

ILLEGAL NARCOTICS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BONO). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MICA. Madam Speaker, my colleagues, I am pleased to come to the floor again tonight and will be coming to the floor each and every week I get the opportunity to talk about a situation that I think is our number one national social problem, and that is the problem of illegal narcotics and substance abuse in our Nation.

In this Congress, as many of my colleagues know, I was assigned a responsibility to chair the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources of the Committee on Government Reform.

With that responsibility, I inherited a position that was really held by the former chair of the national security subcommittee on which I served, and the chair of that subcommittee was the honorable gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), who is now Speaker of the House.

I may say at this time that the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) helped put back together our national effort to begin to address the problem of drug abuse, illegal narcotics trafficking, and address in a very serious fashion for the first time since this administration took office the problem of illegal narcotics that face our Nation and our community. So I am pleased to inherit that responsibility.

I am also troubled by that responsibility because the problem is so enormous. The scope of this problem, my colleagues, goes beyond anything we see on the nightly news. I know the attention of the Nation and the Congress and all Americans has been focused on the tragedy in Colorado; and certainly that was a tremendous human tragedy, with a loss of some 15 precious lives.

I know also, my colleagues, that the attention of the Nation and the Congress is focused today and tonight and will be this week on the situation in Kosovo, in harm's way. But my colleagues, a very, very serious situation faces this Congress, and that is what to do about the rising use of illegal narcotics, particularly among our young people and among our population across this Nation.

And it is not just a question of use. If there was not any damage, if there was not any result, people may very well turn their heads the other way and ignore the problem. But, my colleagues, the problem is absolutely enormous.

Over 14,000 and possibly up to 20,000 Americans, depending on whose statistics we use, last year lost their lives in our Nation as a result of drug-related causes. This is an astronomical figure.

And I have said on the House floor since this President took office, approximately 100,000 Americans, the population of some of our larger cities in this country, have died at the hands and through the use and abuse of illegal narcotics and the tragedy that it has brought to their lives and to their families.

So tonight I am back again, with that responsibility, seeking answers; and tonight I plan to focus a bit again on the history of how we got into this situation and review that. Because I think it is important that we learn from the mistakes of the past, we learn from the mistakes of the Congress, we learn from the mistakes of this administration, we learn from the mistakes of this President and we try to improve on what we are doing both in policy and legislative action.

It is important, I think, also that we focus beyond the past at what we are doing as a Congress now, what programs have been instituted. I will talk about those briefly.

And then I want to talk about another subject that fits into the question of interdiction and stopping illegal narcotics in a cost-effective manner before they ever reach our shores so that we limit the sheer quantity and supply of illegal hard narcotics coming into the United States of America. And that subject will deal tonight with the question of Panama and this administration's failed negotiations, this administration's failed planning and this administration's complete lack of response to a situation that confronts us in the next few days.

In fact, May 1 we must stop all flights from Panama and we are giving up all of our assets in the Panama Canal. I want to talk about how that affects our ability to conduct and advance surveillance, how it is going to cost the American taxpayers a huge sum of money to deal with the failed negotiations again of this administration.

Incidentally, I will be holding a hearing next week on the Panama Canal situation as it relates to the narcotics trafficking issue. But later in this month I will be holding a hearing on the question of drug legalization.

Since I have taken over as chair of this subcommittee, I have received many requests to look at decriminalization, legalization, and other alternatives to incarceration. And I think that that subject deserves a review by the Congress, a serious study, and an examination as to how we can better address this growing problem of the people who are affected through the problems of trafficking or use of illegal narcotics. So those are some of the topics I plan to discuss tonight.

I would like to go back to the situation for a minute. I hate to repeat this.