

The Democrat party would like to see universal coverage, and stop the predatory price discriminatory practices of the pharmaceutical companies.

I must say, we have to thank the pharmacists throughout the State who have brought this to our attention and have helped us in these studies to show us what they have to pay. It is not their fault. The local pharmacist is doing the best they can. They get the price. If the customer is with Blue Cross/Blue Shield, they pay one price, with Aetna they pay a different price, with the Federal system they pay a different price. That is passed on from the pharmaceutical companies. The markup is very, very small, 1 or 2, 3 percent at most. These are the prices being set by the pharmaceutical companies.

I think in this day and age there is no reason why we cannot have prescription drug coverage for our seniors, especially those who, like these widows that I have brought these letters from, they have written to me, they did not have insurance policies. They did not have insurance plans. Their husbands are deceased. They live on social security. That is it.

No one would devise a Medicare plan nowadays without prescription drugs. Prescription drugs are wonderful. They save lives. We should have it. We should have it for everyone.

I want to thank the gentlewoman for her leadership. I look forward to working with her over the Easter break. I am sure we will be doing more town hall meetings. I am sure we will see more and more discussion about prescription drug coverage. But I thank the gentlewoman for having this special order tonight. It is an issue very near to the seniors in my district and throughout this country.

We reach out to our Republican friends. Together we can solve this problem. I hope that we will be joined by our friends across the aisle to put forth a program to just use the purchasing power of the Federal government under the Federal supply service, pass that on to those uninsured seniors, and we can cut the price in half for those seniors. That is not asking too much. I think we could do that. I hope they will join us with that.

Ms. STABENOW. I thank the gentleman very much for his efforts. I know this adds another dimension in our rural parts of the country in Michigan, up north in the UP, where it is more difficult to get to a hospital or other facilities as well. We need to really be strengthening our home health care and medications so people can be living at home and living with family, and having the opportunity to be independent. They have longer distances as well to drive, and it complicates health care provision, I know.

I want to thank the gentleman for all of his work. He is at the front end of what is happening, and I want to thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) for that.

Mr. Speaker, let me just stress again that we have within our means the

ability to solve this problem. Medicare was started in 1965 because half of our seniors could not find insurance or could not afford it. It has now become a great American success story of having a promise that every senior has some basic health care available to them once they reach age 65 or if they are disabled.

What we have today, though, is a false promise, because we cannot provide the kind of health care or access to the kind of health care that is practiced today. That is predominantly through our prescription drug strategies for providing health care. More and more of health care is provided through medications, and if the health care plan does not cover medications, people are in very tough shape.

Our goal is to modernize Medicare to cover the way health care is provided today. That is it. We are hoping that our colleagues will want to do that. My greatest fear is that there will be proposals put forward to subsidize the high cost, help seniors pay for the high prices, but not do anything to get a handle on the prices or bring some accountability to those prices.

We need to have somebody negotiating on behalf of seniors through Medicare to get the same kind of group discounts that people do if they go through a private insurance company or through an HMO. That is what can happen. The purchasing power of Medicare can make that happen, if we act this year. We have the ability to act, we have the resources to act, and we can do that on behalf of all of our seniors if we have the political will to make it happen. We did it with Y2K and we can do it with Medicare and prescription drugs for our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I know the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) has been from northern Ohio, bordering right on Michigan, and we have a lot of ways in which we work together fighting for our seniors, for our families. She has also been a champion on this issue, as well.

I will just say in conclusion that we are going to keep going every week, every week, every week, until this gets fixed, because we can do no less for our seniors.

CONGRESS SHOULD NOT APPROVE PERMANENT NORMAL TRADE STATUS FOR THE PEOPLE'S RE- PUBLIC OF CHINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

IN SUPPORT OF PRESCRIPTION DRUG COVERAGE FOR SENIORS

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to thank my very able colleague, the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW), for taking out this special order tonight on the important issue of prescription drugs. I would like to lend my verbal support and moral support to everything she is trying to do in

taking on this great leadership challenge for our Nation.

This past weekend I visited one of my dear friends back home who was denied coverage for prescription drugs, and was told that if he were to try to save his life in a cancer treatment, he and his wife would have to cough up \$1,500 a week. How would Members like to have to face that decision as they are trying to save their lives, and their family is surrounding them at one of the most difficult times it has ever faced?

So I am with the gentlewoman in her efforts here to do what is right for our senior citizens as well as our families. The people in the room in the hospital were from all ages, all the relatives. Here they had to contend with these insurance companies and all these prescription drug problems when they were trying to deal with a life and death situation.

I thank the gentlewoman from Michigan. We admire the gentlewoman's work and she has our support.

Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to advise my colleagues about one more reason that this Congress should not approve a blank check that will be before us in about 5 weeks called "Approving Permanent Normal Trade Status for the People's Republic of China."

I want Members to know, and I am placing in the RECORD the story of another one of my constituents from near Toledo, Ohio, in the village of White House. I hope the message I give tonight will reach the White House here in Washington.

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This is the story of Ciping Huang, a Chinese American at the University of Toledo, married to a gentleman from my community. She has been harassed, detained, interrogated, and expelled from China because of her association as a member of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars in our Nation. She has been refused reentry into China to visit her ill father who is suffering from cancer, and I can think of no better example of the callous disregard for human rights exhibited daily by the government of the People's Republic of China than her story. I will read her letter to you, and I hope to bring her to Washington as this debate ensues.

She says, "Dear Congresswoman, my name is Ciping Huang and I am a council member of the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars in the United States."

She has been an elected officer in that organization, which was established in 1989, after the Tiananmen Square massacre.

"Unfortunately," she writes, "our involvement, our association's involvement, in democracy and freedom for China has resulted in harsh treatment by the Chinese Communist government, in particular on our student members as they try to return to their homeland. Whether a Chinese citizen or

an American citizen, our members can be harassed, detained, threatened or kicked out of China because of our activities. And what are our activities? Consistent delivery of overseas donations to the June 4 massacre victims and families from Tiananmen Square.

We support and have supported conditional yearly renewal of the most favored nation trade status for China, and because we lobby the United States Congress to provide protection for Chinese students and scholars from punishment by the Chinese Government due to their roles in fighting for democracy since 1989.

She says, "Take my story as an example. In 1998, while I went home to visit my aging parents in China, I was taken away by the secret police for interrogation on many details related to our student association and the activities of other Chinese Democratic groups and organizations.

For several days, they tried to force me to do things I did not want to do, including signing a confession letter. On the fifth day I was given 20 minutes to pack my luggage and say good-bye to my scared parents and was forced into Hong Kong. Still, the secret police told me they had treated me leniently because I am married to an American.

He had contacted his congressional representative, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPUR), in order to protect me. The government told me I must cooperate with them afterwards and do what they wanted me to do if I ever wanted to return home to visit my parents again.

Last September, I learned my father had a 102 degree fever for several days and was diagnosed with cancer. I decided to take a trip back home immediately. However, about 20 police stopped me at the Shanghai International Airport. They searched my luggage and would not let me make phone calls or even go to the bathroom.

In the airport I asked them to respect the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the Chinese President had just signed, and let me go visit my ill father, but my plea was simply ignored. I was put on the airplane back to Tokyo, even though they knew that the hospital had sent us a critical condition notice which stated that my father could die any minute.

In Tokyo, I repeatedly appealed to the Chinese authorities to allow me into China for basic humanitarian reasons but to no avail. Up until this day, I still have not been able to visit my poor father.

"For a long time," she says,

I have viewed America, its people and its government as the ones who hold the moral flags high who would be willing to help and sometimes sacrifice themselves for the people in the rest of the world to gain their basic human rights and dignity, and for humanitarian reasons.

Now for this permanent normal trade status, as well as admission to the WTO, the World Trade Organization, I wish you could prove that again. I wish you could answer this question correctly: Is business more important than the principles we live by? Do we care about the human rights condition of more than 1.2 billion human lives

In the past, the annual congressional conditional renewal of most favored nation to China was able to provide some leverage for Chinese human rights improvement, such as the release of some political prisoners and the relaxation of the political atmosphere within China. Unfortunately, as

you all know, without the attachment of the human rights improvement, conditions in China have deteriorated in the last few years.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I would like to insert the remainder of this letter in the RECORD, and I will come to the floor again to read the conclusion.

The Chinese Communist government has not and will not learn democracy and respect human dignity from the PNTR. They would only take its passage as an advantage and signal that it is OK to continue their miserable, poor record on human rights and democracy.

But, if America could care less about people far away (look at what they have done to FaLun Gong members and Taiwan recently), I hope you do realize that the PNTR would do no more benefit for American workers, especially those in the trade Unions where people earn a living wage with health and retirement benefits. In China, there are no real workers unions; thus, it puts American workers in a much more disadvantaged position to compete with.

Let me stress, I wish that America will protect the human rights of its own people. Furthermore, America should help to protect the human rights of its own people by helping to protect the human rights of the people in the other countries. Only when these countries have human rights and democracy, shall the world be in peace. And I wish we could hold morality above money, but not the other way around. And I wish none of us, including our democratic government, would have to kneel in front of a dictatorial government for money, or mercy, or the human rights we deserve to have. And finally, with all of your conscience and help, I wish that in the near future, I would be able to visit my ill father in my homeland.

Thank you all.

Sincerely,

CIPING HUANG.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TODAY TO CHANGE THE CURRENT CLIMATE AS FAR AS PRESCRIPTION DRUGS FOR SENIORS IN THIS COUNTRY

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

Mr. COBURN. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to address the American public and Members of the House tonight. I find myself in a minority in Washington, both among the Republicans and the Democrats. I am a practicing physician that normally practices and sees patients on Mondays and Fridays when I am not in Washington, and I see before us a situation much like a patient who would come to me with a fever, chills and night sweats, and the treatment we are about to give to that patient is to tell them to take an aspirin and cover up in a blanket and go home and they will get better, when the underlying problem is that they have pneumonia. Without totally diagnosing their disease, what I have done is committed inappropriate care and have actually harmed the patient.

If one is a senior citizen tonight, I want them to listen very carefully to

what I am going to explain to them about Medicare, and the tack that I am going to take is not necessarily going to be appreciated by most of the Members of this body.

I also happen to be a term-limited Member of Congress. I am not running for reelection, and I want to say that in my heart, knowing how severe the problems are for my patients with prescription drugs, the worst thing we can do for seniors is to add a costly prescription benefit drug to the Medicare program.

I am going to spend the next hour outlining why that is the case and why it ignores what the real problems are in the drug industry and the physician practices that now many of our seniors find themselves involved with.

I also want everyone to know that Medicare has been abused by the Members of this body, the other body and previous Presidents, because most workers in this country, as a matter of fact all workers in this country except if they are a Federal employee, are paying 1.45 cents out of every dollar they earn, no matter how much money they earn, into the Medicare part A trust fund.

As they pay that 1.45 cents, so does their employer. So that is almost 3 cents out of every dollar that is earned by every employee is paid into the Medicare part A trust fund.

The Congress, with the consent of the Presidents over the last 20 years, have stolen \$166 billion of that money. What they have done is they have put an IOU in there and said we will pay this back some day in the future, but they took that money and spent it on other programs. They did not say we need to raise taxes to do this good program. They did not say we are going to take the Medicare money and spend it on this program. They just very quietly took \$166 billion out of that trust fund for a hospital trust fund and spent it on other programs.

Now that is not a partisan statement. That is Republicans and Democrats alike.

So we now find that as of 2 weeks ago, that trust fund is going to be totally bankrupt by the year 2015.

Now we had some good news this last week. That has advanced to 2023; that is, if we do not do anything with Medicare.

We know that at least 17 cents out of every dollar that is paid out for Medicare is inappropriate. Where is the reform for Medicare? Where is the fix to the very program that is supposed to be supplying the needs of our seniors?

I see every day that I am in practice seniors who have a difficult time accomplishing what I want them to do as far as their drugs. I see seniors, and we have had described tonight, that have to make a choice between whether they are going to eat a meal or take a medicine. That is not all because there is not a prescription drug benefit because of Medicare, and what I want to outline is some of the deeper problems that are