

paid for health insurance premiums and unreimbursed prescription drugs. What I am proposing would also provide much-needed relief to individuals struggling with the high cost of health insurance and prescription drugs through a tax deduction.

As we all know, employers can write off the cost of health care coverage that is purchased for their employees. Why cannot individuals be afforded this same opportunity to write off their premiums and their unreimbursed prescription drug expenses? The current tax code sets a threshold at 7.5 percent of adjusted gross income before medical expenses can be taken as a write-off. I do not think this is fair.

Right now, under the current tax code, in order to claim health care expenses the individuals must file an itemized tax return. I believe that all taxpayers should be allowed to deduct these out-of-pocket expenses and costs and that we need to include a place where this deduction could be taken on the short form such as the 1040 EZ, and the 1040A. My bill also applies to the self-employed because individuals who are self-employed will not be eligible for a 100 percent write-off until the year 2003.

Employer-sponsored health insurance is declining. In 1987, 69.2 percent of the population under 65 had health insurance through their place of employment or a family member's place of employment. That number declined to 64.9 percent in 1998. Just who are we talking about? Well, four out of five uninsured Americans in 1998 lived in a family with a full-time worker. Only 72 percent of employees are eligible for coverage from their employer, and about 40 percent of small businesses, 50 workers or less, do not offer any kind of health insurance. This is according to the National Coalition on Health Care.

So who is affected? Low and middle-income families; young adults 18 to 24 make up 30 percent of the uninsured; the near-elderly ages 55 to 64; minority and immigrant populations; people who work in small businesses; others include people with day-labor jobs, temporary or part-time jobs.

I believe we must address this issue because so many Americans are uninsured today, and many millions more are underinsured.

So you might ask why is this so important. Because we all end up paying for the uninsured through higher premiums, deductibles and copayments for covered services, higher taxes for uncompensated care, and reduced wages.

Did you know that Americans spends more than \$1 trillion on health care? That represents about 13.5 percent of the gross domestic product. By 2008, spending will increase to 16.5 percent of the gross domestic product. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Americans spend more per capita for health care than any other nation in the world.

But why are so many people uninsured? Most studies cite cost as a

major reason for not having insurance. Many workers decline coverage through their place of employment because they cannot afford to pay their share of the premium. Others, such as temporary workers, cannot afford to purchase their own insurance.

We all know that the cost of health care has risen dramatically over the last 20 years. The average premium costs about \$4,500 for an individual and about \$6,500 for a family. Of that amount, employees pay 10 to 30 percent of that premium. Unfortunately, things will probably get worse because many employers cover the cost of the high premiums to keep workers in a tight labor market. However, if the economy continues to slow down and unemployment begins to rise, then employers might pass the cost along to the employees or in fact discontinue providing health insurance altogether.

Seniors, in particular, have been impacted because so many HMOs have pulled out of Medicare due in large part to the high cost of prescription drugs. Allowing a simple write-off of certain costly health care expenses such as health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenses for prescription drugs would be a tremendous benefit that may not be available to them under the current system.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sending out a letter; and I hope all of my colleagues cosponsor my bill. It makes sense to have all taxpayers have this type of deduction available to them.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 41 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Reverend Dr. Cheryl J. Sanders, Third Street Church of God, Washington, D.C., offered the following prayer:

Eternal God, we lift hearts full of gratitude to You on this day that You have made, thanking You for the invitation to rejoice and be glad in it. We give thanks for the women and men of this House of Representatives.

Make Your presence and Your purpose come alive in their deliberations and debates today. By Your spirit, please empower their leadership and legislative process. Through them extend Your blessing to every family and community represented here today, Your grace to those without representation, Your equity to the poor, Your

peace to the troubled, Your light to those in despair.

Grant us all full access to the healing resources and reconciling justice You have ordained for our Nation.

In Your name we pray. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. NORTON led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 420. An act to amend title 11, United States Code, and for other purposes.

RECOGNIZING THE REVEREND DR. CHERYL J. SANDERS, SENIOR PASTOR, THIRD STREET CHURCH OF GOD

(Ms. NORTON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, it is especially appropriate during this Women's History Month that we have welcomed for prayer a distinguished young woman, an ordained minister of the Church of God, the Reverend Dr. Cheryl Sanders. Not only is Reverend Sanders the senior minister of one of the District's oldest and most distinguished churches, the Third Street Church of God, she is professor of Christian Ethics at Howard University.

Not only does Dr. Sanders minister to the poor as a gifted preacher, she is a woman of extraordinary intellectual range. She has written and taught broadly on subjects ranging from biomedical ethics to the Holiness Pentecostal experience and African American religion and culture. I am proud to note that she has a special interest in feminist ethics.

Madam Speaker, I am particularly proud and pleased to celebrate Women's History Month by having the prayer offered this morning by a woman who, like me, is a native Washingtonian, who attended D.C. public

schools, where she was well prepared to achieve her BA at Swarthmore and her masters and doctorate at Howard University Divinity School, where she now teaches.

Dr. Sanders' life as a Christian minister includes her husband and two children. The Church is blessed when such an able and dedicated woman is called to teach and preach in the Nation's Capital.

PRESERVING MARRIAGE

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Madam Speaker, healthy families are fundamentally important to a healthy America. This should go without saying. According to our best data, out-of-wedlock births and weakened marriages are the principal causes of child poverty, welfare dependence, crime, drug use, and child abuse. But the Federal Government spends \$150 billion, that is with a B, on welfare programs to subsidize and support single-parent families, and only \$150 million trying to reduce out-of-wedlock births.

In other words, we spend 1,000 times as much money supporting single-parent families as we spend encouraging parents to commit to raising their children together.

It is time we remembered the traditional two-parent family. Single parents often do a great job, even against the odds. There are millions of heroic single parents in this country doing their best to support and raise their children. But ask them what they think, and they will be the first to tell you that kids would be better off with both mother and dad caring for them.

TIME TO PASS A FLAT TAX

(Mr. TRAFICANT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. TRAFICANT. From the womb to the tomb, Madam Speaker, the Internal Rectal Service is one big enema. Think about it: they tax our income, they tax our savings, they tax our sex, they tax our property sales profits, they even tax our income when we die.

Is it any wonder America is taxed off? We happen to be suffering from a disease called Taxes Mortis Americanus.

Beam me up. It is time to pass a flat, simple 15 percent sales tax, and fire these nincompoops at the IRS.

Think about it.

I yield back the socialist, communist income tax scheme of these United States.

THE BUDGET, BY THE NUMBERS

(Mr. GIBBONS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1

minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GIBBONS. Madam Speaker, the facts are in, and the numbers do not lie. The budget proposed by this Republican-led Congress will meet not only all of the needs, but the priorities as well of the American people.

This budget continues our commitment to improving education by investing \$80 billion next year, that is a 14 percent increase, in the education budget; and it supports our national defense with a \$14 billion budget increase, and a \$5.7 billion increase specifically for improving service members' pay, housing, and veterans health care.

In addition, this budget also includes \$153 billion for Medicare reform, and \$2.8 billion for the National Institutes of Health. We pay down a historic \$2 trillion of the public debt, and ensure that the \$2.6 trillion Social Security trust fund remains safe from the Washington spendthrifts.

Madam Speaker, we achieve all these goals while still giving the American families meaningful and fair tax relief, meaning \$1,600 for the average family of four will be back in their pockets for them to spend.

Madam Speaker, the numbers simply do not lie. And there is one more, millions, and that is how many Americans want us to pass this reasonable budget and tax relief now.

180TH ANNIVERSARY OF GREEK INDEPENDENCE

(Mr. CROWLEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CROWLEY. Madam Speaker, I am pleased today to rise in honor of the 180th anniversary of Greek independence.

It was 180 years ago that the Greek patriots rose up against the Ottomans in a courageous act of defiance. Many of them fought and died for what they believed in, the right of self-determination, self-governance, that an independent Greek nation should rightfully exist alongside other sovereign nations, free of foreign domination, oppression and constraints.

A country with a rich history stretching back more than 4,000 years, Greece remains the cradle of democracy and one of the most important contributors to Western Civilization.

When the Founding Fathers of this country sought to create a government of, by, and for the people, they reached for inspiration in the words and theories of the great Greek philosophers.

On this day we reaffirm the common democratic heritage we share. Like our day of independence on July 4th, in which we are always reminded of the cost of freedom and independence, it is only fitting that the Congress of the United States commemorate the struggle that led to Greek independence. We fought the same battles, and won, as did those Greek patriots.

PROTECTING SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE USING A LOCK BOX

(Mr. STEARNS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STEARNS. Madam Speaker, more than 76 million baby boomers are marching toward retirement, creating the greatest demographic challenge this Nation has ever faced. Our government is not prepared to meet their needs. Medicare could be insolvent in the near future. In just a few years, Social Security could be in the red.

The implications are frightening. Seniors currently rely on Social Security for nearly half of their incomes. Medicare provides a staggering amount of the elderly with their basic insurance benefits.

That is why the Republican Congress has taken the first step. We stopped the 30-year raid on the Social Security trust fund, and also on Medicare. Republicans made retirement security a priority and followed through on our word. Now Congress has adopted a lock box on the Social Security program and the Medicare program.

Madam Speaker, Republicans stopped Congress from spending the surplus out of these trust funds for new spending programs.

RECOGNIZING NATIONAL AGRICULTURE WEEK AND AG DAY

(Mr. KENNEDY of Minnesota asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KENNEDY of Minnesota. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the men and women of America who help feed the world. This week is National Agriculture Week, and today is Ag Day. It is a time when we take a moment to pay tribute to those that work the land to feed our world.

For many of the constituents in my district, it is a very special day. Southwest Minnesota is a national leader in producing soybeans, corn, sugar, turkeys, pork, and dairy products.

The efficiency of U.S. farmers is a benefit to all Americans. American families spend approximately 9 percent of their income on food, compared to 11 percent in the United Kingdom, 17 percent in Japan and 53 percent in India.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues not to forget the farmer among all of the other pressing issues of the day. Agriculture is a vital link to the success of our Nation, and we must help our farmers by working to grow demand for their products.

ADMINISTRATION DOING NOTHING TO HELP POWER CRISIS

(Mr. DEFAZIO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)