

40 years, do my colleagues not think we owe the common courtesy and decency to the taxpayers to get them the best price, not the premium price?

Today, Americans pay the most of any industrialized country for pharmaceutical products. Yet on each of the areas, market access and competition, bulk purchasing, or in generics, the conference took a punch. I understand why. I am not naive to politics. I understand who benefits.

There was an article in *The Washington Post* showing that the pharmaceutical industry would garner \$132 billion in additional revenue from this legislation, and who do my colleagues think is going to give that \$132 billion? Our parents, grandparents, and the taxpayers. That is the way the system works, but in each of these cases we could have done something to lower prices and make the needed medications more affordable and more accessible, and we chose not to.

That is why I am opposing this legislation. It does nothing to affect the price of prescription drugs that on average has gone up 15 to 20 percent a year as the cause of inflation. Prescription drugs are one of the single reasons for the rise of inflation in health care in general. We could do something to affect the prices of medications and we chose not to.

I think it is important to know, as somebody whose life was saved by types of medications, what the pharmaceutical industry does is very important. The research they do is very important. We Americans are the leaders in the world in new pharmaceutical research, and the reason is because the pharmaceutical industry here in the United States is the beneficiary of the generosity of the taxpayers. The research and development tax credit, all the research and development of new medications, life-saving medication is paid for by the taxpayers.

SUPPORT FOR THE CONFERENCE REPORT ON THE MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG AND MODERNIZATION ACT

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

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in support of the conference report for the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act. Tomorrow, this body is poised to pass historic legislation that will provide millions of seniors access to a responsible and affordable prescription drug benefit. Almost 40 years ago, a promise was made to seniors, a promise that they could depend on Medicare for affordable, reliable, and quality health care.

With passage of this conference report, we will achieve numerous goals that will strengthen the current Medicare program and will protect the most vulnerable seniors. Low-income seniors and those with extremely high pre-

scription drug costs are given specific consideration.

While at the same time bringing much-needed fiscal relief in the overall cost of prescription drugs to all seniors, by adding a voluntary prescription drug benefit and modernizing the program to give seniors more choice in their overall health plans, Congress has an opportunity to improve the quality of health care being provided in the Medicare program for millions of seniors.

As a Member that represents a rural district, I am also very pleased with many of the rural provider provisions contained in this report. Under this legislation, unequal payments for equal work will no longer be status quo for rural America's health care providers.

Hospitals are important to rural communities for three reasons. First and foremost, they provide health care services for the residents. Second, hospitals are an economic engine in rural communities, and in my district they are the first or second largest employer, providing good-paying jobs. Third, hospitals are an economic development tool. Without adequate access to health care, it is difficult for a community to retain and attract businesses. A strong health care system is vital to the strength and stability of any community.

I am also pleased that this conference report also contains a provision to establish health savings accounts. This will help not only seniors but all Americans to better afford their health care. Health savings accounts will allow individuals to save, grow and spend their hard-earned dollars tax free for necessary out-of-pocket medical expenses. These accounts will go a long way in helping to make health care more affordable for families and individuals of all ages.

Mr. Speaker, when I first ran for office 3 years ago, I committed myself to working toward adding a prescription drug benefit in Medicare. I am pleased to support this conference report which I believe will move Medicare into the 21st century, and I urge all my colleagues to do the same.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ROGERS of Alabama). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WOOLSEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CASTRO SEEKS TO KILL PEACEFUL CUBAN DISSIDENT DR. OSCAR ELIAS BISCET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I try to come to

this floor every week to highlight the existence of the individual cases of political prisoners on an island only 90 miles away from the United States, thousands of political prisoners, thousands upon thousands. Tonight, I speak of perhaps the most, or certainly one of the most respected of the political prisoners in the enslaved island of Cuba, Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet.

Dr. Biscet, prisoner of conscience, declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, is an extraordinary man. He maintains a philosophy of nonviolence, and yet his nonviolence has been responded to continuously by the violence of what is without any doubt a gangster regime run by the gangster in chief, the totalitarian tyrant of Cuba.

Now, Dr. Biscet was sentenced to 3 years in the Cuban gulag. He was sentenced in 1998 to 3 years in a Cuban gulag. When he was released last October, October of 2002, he was out of prison only a few weeks when he was rounded up again and sentenced this time for "association with enemies of the State," and he was sentenced, along with over 75 other peaceful dissidents and independent journalists, to 25 years in the Cuban gulag.

A few weeks ago, they told Dr. Biscet that he was going to be placed with a serial killer, someone who was a common criminal and who had murdered many, many people. He objected to that. As a consequence of his objection, Dr. Biscet has been placed in what is called the tomb. He is underground in solitary confinement, in a punishment cell. And so that he fully understood the dimension of his punishment, a serial killer was placed along with him in the tomb. So Dr. Biscet is at this moment in a tomb in the Cuban gulag because he believes in freedom and democracy, and he has espoused support for Mahatma Gandhi and for Martin Luther King and the peaceful methods to achieve the change that those great leaders represent.

The question I ask this evening, the one question which begs to be asked of our colleagues, is how can they come here time and time again to this floor and in the other House to ask for measures that would provide additional revenue to that dictatorship; some of them after having received one of the 8-hour or 10-hour banquets that the Cuban dictator likes to offer to his friends, they have come here and been zealous advocates for someone who they consider so charming, so admirable, so intelligent? In fact, one of our colleagues was so impressed with the Cuban tyrant when Castro told him that his shoes were dirty, that he should shine his shoes, that he melted in admiration before the charming tyrant, who has such interesting comments, this tyrant who maintains thousands of men and women in the gulag because of their support of men and women believing in freedom and democracy.

Another question is begged, Mr. Speaker: Where is the free press that

we enjoy in this country and in the international community and in the community of democracies? Where are the reporters, the members of the media who are talking about what is happening to Dr. Biscet? Is there not an elemental, an elemental duty and responsibility to talk about these facts by the free press? There is. They know it, and they are failing in that elemental duty.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SCHIFF addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take the time of the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

MISTREATMENT OF CUBAN POLITICAL PRISONER, DR. OSCAR BISCET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw attention to the continued plight and mistreatment of political prisoners locked in Cuban jails, and obviously joining with my colleagues from Florida, and I thank also my other colleague from New Jersey, specifically paying attention to Dr. Oscar Biscet.

I have spoken on numerous occasions here on the House floor of the crushing campaign Castro waged against the Cuban pro-democracy movement earlier this year. Over the course of a few weeks in late March and early April, Castro's regime arrested an array of political opposition leaders and pro-democracy advocates. Inside of a month, the dissidents were arrested, arraigned, tried, and sentenced.

Dr. Biscet, already in state custody at the time, was tried in tandem with the other dissidents, and in April was sentenced for 25 years for "serving as a mercenary to a foreign state."

Dr. Biscet is a 42-year-old physician. He is President of the Lawton Foundation for Human Rights. He is a well-known follower of Ghandi and Martin Luther King, and is heralded for his religious and civic leadership. Just last week, on November 11, at Prison Kilo Cinco y Medio, Dr. Biscet peacefully protested with six other political prisoners the cruel treatment given by prison authorities to the family of an-

other fellow prisoner during their scheduled visit. Fearing that Dr. Biscet was becoming a leader among the other prisoners, he was transferred the next day to another maximum security prison in the province of Pinar del Rio, called Kilo 8.

In Kilo 8, Dr. Biscet has been confined in a punishment cell that he has referred to as a dungeon with another prisoner who has committed 12 violent criminal assaults, a blatant attempt to put Dr. Biscet's life in danger. His wife and parents traveled to Kilo 8 this Monday, November 17, for their assigned family visit. When they arrived, prison authorities informed them that Dr. Biscet was punished for 21 days without family visits. They told his family he is currently being confined in a cell with no sunlight that literally measures four feet by four feet. They told his family that he had been denied food supplies and toiletries and is without writing or reading materials.

Upon hearing this news, his mother required medical attention from the prison staff due to a sudden rise in her blood pressure and the horror of her son's living conditions. Mr. Speaker, compelled by circumstances and the persistence of Dr. Biscet's wife, prison authorities allowed his mother to see her son, but only for 10 minutes. Dr. Biscet asked his mother to alert international public opinion, since he had broken no prison rule, and they were forcing him to share a cell with a violent criminal intentionally placing his life in danger.

So I join my colleagues here on the House floor to inform Congress and the American public of the inhumane treatment of Dr. Biscet. I ask all my colleagues to join us here on the floor and to demand the unconditional and immediate release of Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet and all those prisoners whose only crime is a desire for basic human rights. We must send a strong message to Castro that his abuse of Cuban political prisoners has not gone unnoticed and will not be allowed to continue.

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

(Mr. GUTKNECHT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. HINCHEY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

DR. OSCAR BISCET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise with my colleagues

today in support of one of the most courageous men of peace on the planet today, an advocate for freedom, Dr. Oscar Biscet. A long-time human rights activist and pro-life doctor in Cuba, Dr. Biscet had already spent some 3 years, unjustly, 3 years in Castro's gulag for speaking out against the death penalty in Cuba and for calling for the release of all political prisoners.

After his release, Mr. Speaker, in the fall of 2002, he remained undaunted by his oppressors, Castro and the brutal thugs who run his regime, and continued to attempt to peacefully organize human rights' supporters. Dr. Biscet was redetained with 16 other dissidents after they attempted to simply meet in a home in Havana to discuss human rights last September. Just think about that, my colleagues, just simply meeting, gathering together, and in come the thugs to take you away.

When police prevented him from entering that home, Dr. Biscet and others, just like Dr. Martin Luther King, sat down in the street and protested, uttering slogans like "long live human rights," and "freedom for political prisoners." For that, he received a draconian 25-year prison sentence in April. That was during the same time when there was a massive crackdown that Amnesty International pointed out, reminiscent of what happened during the early years of Castro's brutal regime when massive numbers of people were arrested and given long prison sentences, many of those, 75 of them, some of the bravest and brightest in Cuba today: Independent journalists and democracy activists, who now themselves languishing in prison.

Mr. Speaker, while reports of Dr. Biscet's actions in prison continue to be heroic, and the word does get out, this is a man of conscience, a man of courage, the reports of his mistreatment, however, have been equally horrific. He is heroic; the mistreatment is horrific. For months, we know that he has endured solitary confinement for refusing to wear the prisoner's uniform. He has lived with insufficient light, and now no light at all, no running water and no bed. His benign and peaceful protest on November 11 on behalf of the cruel treatment of another prisoner, even though he is suffering so much, Mr. Speaker, he speaks out and tries to lend a hand to other prisoners who are being mistreated, for that he was moved to a punishment cell, as my colleagues have pointed out, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART), who spoke so eloquently a moment ago, to a cell known as the dungeon.

This man, this peaceful man, this Martin Luther King of Cuba is now languishing in a dungeon, a small confined area with no light. He has been put into a prison cell, this dungeon, with a man who on 12 different occasions has committed assault.

I remember during the years of Nicolae Ceausescu, the brutal thug in