

675 lobbyists in this town, about 1.3 lobbyist for every Member of the House, and used its tens of millions of dollars of campaign contributions to win a giant increase in profits at the expense of taxpayers in this country and at the expense of America's senior citizens. The drug companies on this year's Fortune 500 list posted profits of 17 percent, 5½ times the average profit margin of other Fortune 500 firms.

Not only does the Medicare bill signed today by President Bush dramatically expand the drug industry's market, it ensures that drug companies will be able to charge American taxpayers almost any price they want for medicines covered by Medicare. The word on the street in Washington is that the drug industry, PhRMA, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association, PhRMA, is going to contribute \$100 million to President Bush's reelection campaign.

That is why this bill specifically prohibits the government from negotiating fair prices for press medicines. That is right, the Federal Government is not allowed under this bill to even bargain for better drug prices on behalf of seniors or on behalf of American taxpayers. It is what the drug industry wants. And the drug industry in this body always gets what it wants.

The bill the President signed into law relies on the same price discount mechanisms private insurers use, the same mechanisms that have led to double-digit increases in prescription drug costs year after year after year. It is what the drug industry wants. And the drug industry always gets what it wants in the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives. In the private market, prescription drug costs are the fastest-growing component of health care cost increases. Prescription drug costs in the private market increased over 18 percent last year.

The bill rejects also the bipartisan will of a commanding majority in this House, who actually did stand up against a Republican leadership and against President Bush, who actually stood up to the drug lobby in July. Two hundred forty-three of us, many from that sides of the aisle, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL) and many others, voted to give American consumers the choice to buy safe, effective and much more affordable medicine imported from Canada. The legislation that President Bush signed today not only ignores that vote; it negates it. It drives a nail in the coffin of prescription drug importation. Why? It is what the drug industry wanted, and the drug industry always gets what it wants in this institution.

Once again, American consumers lose; the drug industry wins. Drug companies routinely charge American consumers three, four, five times what they charge Canadian customers for the same medicine. As I said earlier, the world on the street in Washington is that PhRMA, the Prescription drug trade association, is going to give \$100

million to the Bush-Cheney reelection effort.

The drug industry is already 5½ times more profitable than the Fortune 500 average, yet they would have us believe any reduction in prices would jeopardize their research and development. The level of U.S. drug prices are not necessary; they are highway robbery. This bill helps to ensure that American consumers, American employers, and American taxpayers keep paying those high prices.

Merry Christmas, PhRMA.

REGARDING THE FIRST SESSION OF THE 108TH CONGRESS

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

Mr. HASTERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening with sadness at the passing of Joe Skeen. Joe Skeen was a friend of mine, a great member of this Congress for many years from New Mexico, somebody who served this Congress with great love, with great compassion, and a steady hand. We will all miss him. He chose not to run in the last Congress, but he was a great friend; and his funeral will be this coming Thursday, and later on we will have a session to honor him.

Mr. Speaker, I also rise this evening to give an end-of-the-session assessment of the first session of the 108th Congress, to recount our accomplishments and to review what we have left to do.

This session of Congress commenced as we were engaged in a struggle against terrorism and as our economy struggled in a near recession. We opened this session with three major goals: first, to make our Nation safer from terrorists and those states that support them; second, to grow our economy and create jobs for American workers; and, third, to make America a better place to live for all of our citizens. We have had a notable success in all three areas.

First, we have made this country more secure from foreign threats. The Congress passed and the President signed three different supplemental appropriation bills to support our efforts on the war on terror. This helped pay for the war in Iraq and for our continued efforts in Afghanistan. And, of course, the American people are greatly concerned for the safety of our troops in both places, but we must continue to support our brave men and women as they fight to defend our freedom and to defeat the terrorists who want to bring death and destruction to our homeland.

Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime and the Taliban's Afghan regime actively supported terrorist organizations. Al-Qaeda trained in both countries. Now, both countries are making the tough, but vitally important, transition to democratic government. Changing terrorist-supporting dictatorships into de-

mocracies is hard work, but it is important work for our national security.

We also passed defense appropriations and authorization bills that included necessary long-term funding for our defense efforts and included a pay increase for our troops and a historic change in the disabled veterans compensation. For the first time since the Civil War, many disabled veterans will be able to receive both their disability payments and their retirement benefits.

The President also signed into law the Military Family Tax Relief Act, which provides overdue tax relief targeted to our dedicated servicemen and their families.

September 11 also proved that we must be vigilant on our home front. That is why we created the Department of Homeland Security in the last Congress. In this session we created a Select Committee on Homeland Security and a Subcommittee on Homeland Security of the Committee on Appropriations so that this Department would have the proper funding and oversight. Indeed, the Congress completed work on the first appropriation bill dedicated solely to homeland security this year.

The second challenge we faced at the beginning of this year was a slowing economy. The economy faced the twin shocks of a bursting high-tech bubble and the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Those shocks undermined both business and consumer confidence, while shattering investor confidence. We had to do something about it. We passed the President's economic growth package aimed at restoring confidence in the business, consumer, and investor sectors. Coupled with the earlier tax cut signed into law in 2001, these tax relief bills accomplished all three goals. It gave small businesses the relief they needed to buy more equipment and incentives to expand their businesses. It returned more money to consumers so that they could spend more. And it inspired investors to return back to the markets.

The results have been better than expected. The economic growth rate hit 8.2 percent in the last quarter. Manufacturing output is at the highest levels in 2 decades. The Dow Jones has reached its highest level in 18 months. And the job rate shows the best signs of improvement in 2 years.

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Aside from the war and the economy, our Nation faced other challenges.

Health care costs continue to be one of the top concerns of our citizens. We passed historic reform of the Medicare system that will now include a prescription drug benefit for the first time in history. I am very proud that we kept our promise to senior citizens by delivering this most important reform.

The prescription drug benefit means that never again will low-income seniors have to face the choice between putting food on the table or paying for

life-saving prescription drugs. It also means that seniors with high-cost drugs will have an insurance benefit that will protect them. Finally, the average senior will get their drug costs reduced by up to 60 percent because of this far-reaching reform.

Included in this historic legislation was historic assistance for rural and urban hospitals, as well as other important health care reforms. I am most proud of the new health savings accounts, tax-free savings accounts that allows consumers to have more control over their health care costs. These health savings accounts will revolutionize the health care market in this country, giving consumers better health care at a lower price.

Aside from health care, we faced another domestic crisis, the lack of comprehensive energy policy. From the rolling brownouts of California to the New York City blackouts, from the turbulence of the natural gas market to the persistent problems of higher gasoline prices, energy policy became a front-burner issue.

So working with the White House, we put together a comprehensive energy policy aimed at making our Nation more energy independent. This legislation did several things. It created incentives to get the most out of our natural resources, from promoting greater energy efficiency, to encouraging the use of renewal fuels such as ethanol. It encouraged greater reliability for electricity by providing for open access of transmission lines, while improving the transparency of electricity markets.

This energy policy has another salutary effect. It will create jobs. The latest estimates are that it will create up to a million jobs. We passed the energy conference report by a large bipartisan margin in the House, and we are waiting for final action by the other body. It is my hope that this vitally important legislation will not get caught up in the flurry of lobbying by the trial lawyers. I urge my colleagues on the other side of the rotunda to drop the delaying tactics and send this conference report to the President.

Another perennial issue is education. In the 107th Congress, we passed the President's No Child Left Behind legislation aimed at increasing accountability and demanding results when it comes to educating our children. This year, we kept our promise by increasing education funding to \$4.1 billion, the highest Federal contribution to education in history. Clearly, we are keeping our promise to the parents and teachers and children of America.

Finally, we passed a series of legislation initiatives designed to make this Nation a better place to live. We passed the Do Not Call and Do Not Spam bills, aimed at stopping consumers from being harassed through the phone and through computer by telemarketers. We passed the Amber Alert bill, to help keep our children be safe from kidnapers. We passed historic levels of fund-

ing to combat AIDS. We passed the President's Healthy Forests Initiative, to protect communities from out-of-control forest fires. We passed the Fair Credit Reporting Act so that consumers have better access to their consumer reports to protect against the persistent problems of credit card fraud.

In other words, we delivered good legislation for the American people. As we get ready for the second session of the 108th Congress, we still have some work to do. We still have a highway bill to pass. Nothing is more important to our Nation's economic well-being than a modern transportation system. I want to get this bill done by early next spring.

We need to complete the work on the welfare reform bill. When we reformed welfare in 1996, we helped millions of Americans get a hand up rather than a hand out. Millions of Americans woke up in the morning and went to work rather than woke up and went to the welfare office. They got a job and got a paycheck. We need to reauthorize this bill, and we need to reauthorize it soon.

We also must find a way to get the budget back to balance. The attacks of September 11, the war against terrorism, and the struggling economy have all led to deficit numbers that, while manageable, must be controlled. This year's nondefense, nonhomeland security discretionary budget increased by a 3 percent margin, a relatively small increase, but one that can be improved. Our budget chairman, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE), has worked hard to find ways where we can control Federal spending. As we debate next year's budget, we will work to find ways to cut the budget deficit in half through lower spending.

But as we work to control spending, we must also work to ensure that the economy stays on track. The tax cuts were enacted to help spur recovery. We must keep them in place to ensure that they finish the job. Those who want to raise taxes and thus threaten our recovery and job creation are just wrong. We have already seen that as the economy grows, the budget deficit falls. Keeping the economy growing is a sensible way to get the budget back to balance.

Finally, we need to start the debate in this Nation on how to reform our tax laws. Not only is our tax system too complicated, it also hurts our Nation's competitiveness. If our companies cannot compete, we lose jobs here in America. As we reform the Foreign Sales Corporation Tax, as required by the recent WTO decision, we must also start a discussion on how we create the best tax system possible to meet the needs of the people of this country in the 21st century.

I want to thank all Members for their patience and for their perseverance. Public service in the Congress is not an easy vocation, and it is especially hard on families. I thank all Members for their service to this Nation. I would

also like to thank the dedicated staff and especially the floor staff, the clerks and the pages, who work long and hard to make this place efficient and workable. Thank you for your fine service to this Nation. I wish you all a happy holiday season, and God bless you all.

TURNING OUR BACKS ON HUNGRY CHILDREN

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to talk about one small program in the omnibus appropriations bill which I believe is a reflection of America's commitment to defeat terrorism, or rather its lack of commitment. It is a reflection of America's commitment to address hunger, poverty, illiteracy and ignorance; or rather, its lack of commitment; and that reflects America's commitment to help educate the children of the world, especially girls; or rather, its lack of commitment.

Tucked away inside the agriculture appropriations section of the omnibus bill is \$50 million for the George McGovern-Robert Dole International Food for Education Program. McGovern-Dole began as a \$300 million pilot program in 2001, providing nutritious meals to nearly 7 million children in 38 countries. The catch, these children had to attend school in order to get the meals. The McGovern-Dole program sends wheat from Illinois, Minnesota and Oregon to feed children at schools in Bolivia and Lebanon. It sends corn, milk and soybeans from Kansas and Wisconsin to feed school children in Nicaragua and Guatemala. And it sends lentils from Idaho and Washington to children we have helped return to school in Afghanistan. Beans from Colorado, rice from Texas and Louisiana, cooking oil from Florida and Tennessee, the blood, sweat and tears of America's farmers find their way to children attending humble schools around the world.

Providing food to malnourished children in schools is one of the most effective strategies to fight hunger and poverty. Where programs are offered, enrollment and attendance rates increase significantly, particularly for girls. Instead of working or searching for food to combat hunger, children have the chance to go to school. Providing food at school is a simple, but effective, means to improve literacy and help poor children break out of poverty.

The McGovern-Dole program helps us achieve many of our foreign policy goals, and communicates America's compassion to those around the world. At the end of the day, it will be programs like McGovern-Dole that will ultimately triumph over poverty and terror.