

livestock that is too diseased, too weak, or too injured to even stand on its own feet out of our food chain.

American families do not want to put downed animal meat products on their dinner tables, and they do not want to worry about whether the meat products purchased from a restaurant contains meat from downed animals. As a matter of fact, new animal welfare standards followed by burger-giants McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's have ended the purchase of meat from downed animals in their food products. I applaud these moves and America's consumers applaud them as well.

Common sense, as well as scientific data, says that the meat taken from a downed animal is unfit for human consumption—its risk of bacterial contamination and other diseases is much much higher than the meat taken from a healthy animal. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) records show that downed animals are often afflicted with gangrene, malignant lymphoma, pneumonia, and other serious illnesses. According to the Food and Drug Administration downed animals are responsible for half of the drug residue found in meat because these animals are often very sick animals, and therefore, are often receiving a variety of drug treatments. Why would anyone want to take a chance and eat this meat?

Not only would this legislation remove tainted meat from the American marketplace, it would help improve the treatment of animals at auctions and slaughterhouses. Most downed animals are old dairy cows, crippled veal calves, and sometimes injured beef cattle. These downed animals, too weak to stand up on their own, are often shocked with electricity, moved with bulldozers, kicked and dragged, all in the effort to move them along the assembly lines to be slaughtered.

Mr. Chairman, our Nation has made great strides in food processing and food production over many years. We've come a long way since the publication of Upton Sinclair's famous century-old work, "The Jungle." But there's still a lot of needless cruelty that goes on in these places. Upton Sinclair wrote back then that the animals were strung up one by one in a "cold-blooded, impersonal way, without a pretense of apology." This still occurs today.

For instance, cows with broken legs are often left for hours or even days without food and water, let alone veterinary care. There is no excuse for this cruel and inhumane treatment in a civilized society. For the sake of our society, our animals, and those who eat meat products, the practice of slaughtering and consuming downed animals must be brought to an end.

Americans rightly do not want to eat meat from downed animals nor do they want to see downed animals cruelly treated the way they are at our slaughterhouses and animal auctions. Five months after the publication of "The Jungle," President Theodore Roosevelt and Congress took action by passing the first "Pure Food and Drug Act" and the first "Meat Inspection Act."

Mr. Chairman, Congress needs to act again. Americans want animals to be treated properly, and they want their food to be safe. I urge Members to support and vote for the Ackerman-LaTourette amendment.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Chairman, as Co-Chair of the Congressional Friends of Animals Caucus

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of the Ackerman Downed Animal Amendment.

Animals too weak, from sickness or injury, to stand or walk are routinely pushed, kicked, dragged, and prodded with electric shocks at auctions and intermediate markets, in an effort to move them to slaughter.

There is no excuse for this unnecessary torment.

The Ackerman amendment will protect these downed animals by discouraging their transport to livestock markets and requiring they be humanely euthanized.

Some greedy individuals know livestock sold for human consumption will bring a higher price than livestock sold for other purposes. To them, the money is more important than the suffering of the animals. In moving these animals to auctions and other markets, these individuals display a cruel disregard for the animals. They also ignore the fact that meat from these animals may be unfit for consumption.

Downed animals do not deserve this kind of cruel treatment, and consumers do not deserve to be subjected to the risk of buying contaminated meat products.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. All time having expired, the question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. ACKERMAN).

The question was taken; and the Chairman pro tempore announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. ACKERMAN) will be postponed.

Mr. BONILLA. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. GOODLATTE) having assumed the chair, Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin, Chairman pro tempore of the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2673) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

LIMITATION ON AMENDMENTS AND PROVIDING FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2673, AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. BONILLA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that it be in order at any time for the Speaker, as though pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, to declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for further consideration of H.R. 2673, which shall proceed according to the following order:

No further amendment to the bill may be offered except pro forma amendments offered by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations or their designees for the purpose of debate and

An amendment by Ms. KAPTUR regarding biofuels, which will be debatable for 20 minutes;

An amendment by Ms. KAPTUR regarding APHIS;

An amendment by Ms. KAPTUR regarding credit cards;

An amendment by Ms. KAPTUR regarding the Website of the Department of Agriculture;

An amendment by Mr. BROWN of Ohio regarding food safety, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes.

Each such amendment may be offered only by the Member designated in this request, or a designee, shall not be subject to amendment, and shall not be subject to a demand for a division of the question in the House or in the Committee of the Whole.

Except as specified, each such amendment shall be debatable for 10 minutes, and debate on each amendment shall be equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent.

All points of order against each of the amendments shall be considered as reserved pending completion of the debate thereon; and each of the amendments may be withdrawn by its proponent after debate thereon.

At the conclusion of consideration of the bill for amendment the Committee shall rise and report the bill to the House with such amendments as may have been adopted. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except for one motion to recommit, with or without instructions.

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

There was no objection.

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. BONILLA. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House resolve itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the further consideration of the bill (H.R. 2673) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

□ 1525

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 2673, with Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. When the Committee of the Whole House rose earlier today, a request for a recorded vote on the amendment by the gentleman from New York (Mr. ACKERMAN) had been postponed, and the bill was open for amendment through page 72, line 23.

Pursuant to the order of the House today, no further amendment to the bill may be offered except pro forma amendments offered by the chairman or ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations or their designees for the purpose of debate and

An amendment by Ms. KAPTUR regarding biofuels, which will be debatable for 20 minutes;

An amendment by Ms. KAPTUR regarding APHIS;

An amendment by Ms. KAPTUR regarding credit cards;

An amendment by Mr. BROWN of Ohio regarding food safety, which shall be debatable for 20 minutes.

Each such amendment may be offered only by the Member designated in this request, or a designee, shall not be subject to amendment, and shall not be subject to a demand for a division of the question in the House or in the Committee of the Whole.

Except as specified, each such amendment shall be debatable for 10 minutes, and debate on each amendment shall be equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent.

All points of order against each of the amendments shall be considered as reserved pending completion of debate thereon; and each of the amendments may be withdrawn by its proponent after debate thereon.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. KAPTUR

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Ms. KAPTUR:

At the end of the bill, add the following new section:

SEC. . None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available in this Act shall be expended to violate Public Law 105-264.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Chairman, we would accept the amendment.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I thank my good friend from Iowa for that, and I just for purposes of the RECORD wish to state that this amendment concerns the recent allegations that have been put forward about individuals at the Department of Agriculture misusing their Federal credit cards that they possess on behalf of the agency.

□ 1530

We look forward to working with the majority to ensure prompt prosecution

and also actions being taken by the Department of Agriculture for us to monitor them as they move forward to make sure that this never happens again. I thank the gentleman for his support.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore (Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin). The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. KAPTUR

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Ms. KAPTUR:

At the end of the bill, add the following new section:

SEC. . None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to issue a final rule in Docket No. 02-06201, "Cost-Sharing for Animal and Plant Health Emergency Programs," 68 Fed. Reg. 40541-40553 (July 8, 2003).

Ms. KAPTUR (during the reading). Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be considered as read and printed in the RECORD.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Chairman, we would accept the amendment of the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LATHAM). Just for purposes of the debate and the record, let us show that this amendment would prohibit the U.S. Department of Agriculture from finalizing a rule on cost sharing between the Federal Government and co-operators, our States, local governments and industry groups on the cost of responding to animal or pest emergencies that threaten U.S. agriculture. We believe this to be a Federal responsibility.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. KAPTUR

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Ms. KAPTUR:

At the end of the bill, add the following new section:

"SEC. . No funds appropriated or made available by this Act may be used to identify by photograph on a department's or agency's website any Member of the House of Representatives or the Senate within 60 days before a federal general election."

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. All points of order are reserved.

Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. KAPTUR. I yield to the gentleman from Iowa.

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Chairman, we would accept the amendment.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I thank the chairman and appreciate the chairman's acceptance of this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MS. KAPTUR

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment offered by Ms. KAPTUR:

Under the heading "COMMON COMPUTING ENVIRONMENT", insert after the dollar amount on page 3, line 9, the following: "(reduced by \$20,000,000)".

Under the heading "RENEWABLE ENERGY PROGRAM", insert after the dollar amount on page 43, line 4, the following: "(increased by \$20,000,000)".

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. All points of order are reserved.

Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. KAPTUR. I yield to the gentleman from Iowa.

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Chairman, we would be more than happy to accept the amendment, and we would like to expedite the process if we could.

Ms. KAPTUR. The gentleman will accept this amendment on biofuels?

Mr. LATHAM. If we could expedite the process.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I would be more than pleased to accept the gentleman's acceptance and to say that there could be no more important action of this government than dragging the U.S. Department of Agriculture into the 21st century, and helping America to become energy self-sufficient at last.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

The amendment was agreed to.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Are there any further amendments?

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to thank the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LATHAM) for moving this bill along. I know there are other Members who may be on their way to the floor right now, and

we wanted to allow a little time for that. But meanwhile, I wanted to say a word about the overall bill and again to express my deep disappointment that the overall level of this discretionary bill is about 5 percent below last year's appropriated levels.

I come from a part of the country where we have experienced quite a bit of flooding. We know that later this year we are going to have some additional requests for disaster assistance. With the limited amount of funding in this bill and the cuts across various accounts, it is going to make it very difficult, barring a supplemental of some sort, to meet all of the requirements that are necessary.

As we look toward Members asking us how good is this bill, I guess the bottom line on this bill is that it is not nearly good enough in view of the challenges that are facing agriculture today.

We appreciate all of the Members who have come down here today to offer amendments. I think that every single one that was passed and awaits votes this afternoon has improved the bill. Those that deal with downed animals, those that deal with the Office of Civil Rights, those that deal with our historically black colleges and Tuskegee Institute, those that deal with improving the U.S. Department of Agriculture's attention to biofuels production, all of these are improvements.

We were very pleased to see the gentlewoman from Guam (Mr. BORDALLO) come to the floor to talk about the insular territories and their very, very significant dependence on agriculture, and over time the actual ignorance by our government toward these critical areas to our country.

If I might just say an additional word on the energy title, one of the reasons we were so concerned about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's inattention to new fuels production is that there is not a corner of rural America where this is not uppermost in people's minds. Whether it is biodiesel, whether it is ethanol, farmers can see the future. Many of them are inventing it. Without question, rural America holds at least a minimum of 20 percent of the potential to displace our overreliance on imported petroleum.

The budget, however, that the administration presented to us was severely underfunded. Not only was the Department of Agriculture not encouraged to move into the 21st century in energy production, but, in fact, the Department of Energy's accounts that deal with energy production and renewable energies were reduced 28 percent in the area of biomass, for example. Members should imagine a future where our capability in producing soy diesel and ethanol is enhanced by the Government of the United States assisting our farmers to bring new energy products online. These can actually produce real value-added and real income to the farm families of our country in the form of new fuels. We could do nothing

more important in the first half of this century, in my opinion in the first decade of this century, than helping to convert from the hydrocarbon age to the carbohydrate age.

Today, over 3 million vehicles on our roads already use E-85, ethanol, made of 85 percent ethanol. Every one of these vehicles is made by our manufacturers. The problem is if you buy a vehicle and you take it to the service station, drivers cannot get the fuel in every State and in every location. You can get it in Iowa. You can get it in Minnesota. Try to get it in Ohio.

The real question is how do we move this industry forward when we know our farmers would rather produce to the market rather than produce to the mailboxes with subsidy payments. I am enjoying this opportunity to have the chairman of the authorizing committee sitting listening to this because I look for a great partnership between the Committee on Appropriations and the authorizing committee in the area of new fuels.

It has been a real disappointment to watch the lethargy at the Department of Agriculture when energy futurists can see the potential in every account. Take a look at research. We have not even invented the plants yet that can give us the most Btus per ton. We are using existing technology to produce the fuels that we are processing today. But just in the research accounts, we are behind the times in getting the plants that would give us the most convertible sugars, the most Btus per ton.

Take a look at how processing facilities are being built across the country, by farmers in places like the State of Minnesota. The State of Minnesota is such a leader; I believe she had the first ethanol plant in America. If we are going to have a national project for biofuels production, we should call it the Minnesota Project because they absolutely were first. Although when I was down in Iowa talking to farmers, they said yes, but Iowa farmers working in Minnesota actually accomplished it!

My point is that some parts of America have seen the future. Farmers are using our waste products from the field, for example, and blending them rather than putting them in landfills or burning them heedlessly produces a Btu stream that we can process and then convert.

I think that the record shows by January 2002, last year, there were well over 100 major fleets in our country that had implemented biodiesel programs, and the leading Federal agency for converting vehicles is not the Department of Agriculture. It is the U.S. Postal Service. I believe they have over 12,000 vehicles that use clean-burning fuels.

We look at the U.S. Air Force, Army, U.S. Department of Energy, NASA, State fleets in States like my own, Ohio, Iowa, Virginia, Missouri, Delaware and New Jersey, city buses in places like the Cincinnati metropolitan

area and the bi-state area of St. Louis, and major public utility fleets such as Commonwealth Edison, Florida Power & Light, Duke Energy, Alabama Power and others.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) has expired.

(By unanimous consent, Ms. KAPTUR was allowed to proceed for 5 additional minutes.)

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Chairman, we appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to plant the seeds of biofuels in the U.S. Department of Agriculture budget for the year 2004.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Chairman, will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. KAPTUR. I yield to the gentlewoman from Connecticut.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Chairman, last week during consideration of the Labor-HHS appropriations bill, I spoke of how this administration and this Congress are making a choice between tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and other pressing priorities.

As a member of the subcommittee, I know that the programs in this bill represent many of these vital priorities supporting our farmers, revitalizing our rural communities, and helping the most needy in our country meet their most basic nutritional needs, and safeguarding our food supply. Yet as a result of the budget allocation given to our subcommittee, the bill includes a nearly 5 percent decrease in funding for agriculture, America's leading domestic industry which brings approximately \$2.1 billion into my State of Connecticut's economy and provides 50,000 jobs for Connecticut each year.

One of the most critical things we do in this bill is ensure the safety of our Nation's food supply; 76 million Americans become sick and 5,000 people die every year from food-borne illness. At a time when there have been record amounts of recalls and ongoing concerns about USDA performance and the integrity of our food supply, this bill underfunds food inspection by \$12 million.

Last week we found out that imported meat inspections have gone down from 17 to 6 percent in the last year.

□ 1545

This bill is headed in the wrong direction.

In addition, this bill prevents implementation of country-of-origin labeling for meat and meat products. Country-of-origin labeling gives people the information that they need to make an informed choice to protect the safety of their families. Thirty-five other countries we trade with, including Canada, Mexico and members of the European Union, already have a country-of-origin labeling system in place.

And American families recognize the need for this labeling. People say that they are willing to pay more to know where their food is coming from. At a time when food imports are increasing

but the number of inspections of imported meat is decreasing, consumers deserve that right to know where their food is coming from. Given the record 56 million pounds of recalled meat last year, again, that is 56 million pounds of recalled meat, this effort is also about being able to trace back contaminated product in the event of a recall. Knowing the source of an outbreak is a critical part of that process so that we can quickly take action to prevent people from getting sick.

Country-of-origin labeling will not violate trade agreements or lead to retaliation. It will not bankrupt the food industry. It will simply let consumers know where their food is coming from. I hope my colleagues will support the Rehberg-Hooley amendment to remove this provision from the bill.

I am also concerned that the WIC program, which helps ensure that the nutritional needs of women and children are met, may not be funded sufficiently in this bill. That leaves no room for error. If the need increases, if food or infant formula prices increase, there will be no funds available to help those who depend the most on the program.

Another priority is prescription drugs, which are increasing on average at a rate of 20 percent annually. The generic drugs program at FDA helps us address those concerns by speeding the approval of affordable drugs. Yet this bill underfunds that program by \$5 million, in addition to underfunding the Best Pharmaceuticals for Children Act and the patient safety and adverse reporting initiative. All are critically important to ensuring the health and safety of every American.

Mr. Chairman, budgets reveal priorities. They reveal values. This bill includes agencies and programs charged with some of our most important responsibilities, many of which protect and oversee the public health. Now is not the time to choose tax cuts for the wealthy over these vital priorities. We must do better. Failure is not an option.

Mr. BONILLA. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. GOODLATTE) having assumed the chair, Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin, Chairman pro tempore of the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2673) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES ON
H.R. 1, MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION
DRUG AND MODERNIZATION ACT
OF 2003

Mr. TAUZIN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take from the

Speaker's table the bill (H.R. 1) to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for a voluntary program for prescription drug coverage under the Medicare Program, to modernize the Medicare Program, to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a deduction to individuals for amounts contributed to health savings security accounts and health savings accounts, to provide for the disposition of unused health benefits in cafeteria plans and flexible spending arrangements, and for other purposes, with Senate amendments thereto, disagree to the Senate amendments, and agree to the conference asked by the Senate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Louisiana?

There was no objection.

MOTION TO INSTRUCT OFFERED BY MR. DAVIS OF TENNESSEE

Mr. DAVIS of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I offer a motion to instruct conferees.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. Davis of Tennessee moves that the managers on the part of the House at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the Senate amendment to the bill H.R. 1 be instructed as follows:

(1) To reject the provisions of subtitle C of title II of the House bill.

(2) The House recede to the Senate on the provisions to guarantee access to prescription drug coverage under section 1860D-13(e) of the Social Security Act, as added by section 101(a) of the Senate amendment.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the rule, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS) will be recognized for 30 minutes and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. TAUZIN) will be recognized for 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS).

Mr. DAVIS of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this motion instructs conferees to do two simple things, two things that the House-passed bill does not accomplish. One, it asks them to provide a guaranteed prescription drug benefit for all our seniors. Number two, it asks them to preserve Medicare as we know it today.

Specifically, this motion instructs the House not to abandon seniors to the mercy of private insurance and pharmaceutical companies. It makes a promise to our seniors. It tells them that if private insurance companies cannot make enough money off them, they can still get a prescription drug benefit.

Mr. Speaker, without this provision, the odds of seniors in my district getting a prescription drug benefit under this bill are virtually slim to none. How do I know this? For years now, private insurance companies have had an opportunity to try and make money off the seniors in my district by offering them a Medicare+Choice benefit. And how many have decided it is worth their while? Only a few.

I know the people in my district, the people of the Appalachian Mountains, of the Cumberland Plateau and southern middle Tennessee, are not alone, the people who live in Byrdstown or in Tracy City or in Kelso or in Hohenwald in our district. Already, private HMOs have abandoned over 2 million seniors.

The second part of this motion is about nothing less than preserving Medicare, a program millions of seniors have come to expect and to trust. Under the House-passed bill, Medicare as we know it will cease to exist in 7 short years, in 2010. Instead of Medicare, seniors will get a voucher for their health care and told to go shopping and will be forced to beg insurance companies and HMOs to offer prescription drug coverage to them, a request that many insurance companies are already on record as saying that they will not be able to fulfill. HMOs will compete against Medicare for younger, healthier seniors, while jacking up the prices for seniors who have chronic conditions and are in need of more care. These "left behind" seniors will have no choice but to remain in traditional Medicare which will be starved of funds, unable to compete with insurance companies and HMOs, and thus will be forced to raise seniors' premiums.

Privatization of Medicare will break up the huge and successful risk pool that Medicare has provided. With only the sickest patients enrolled, Medicare's costs will rise until it costs more than the voucher allotment. Medicare will be forced to price itself out of existence.

Make no mistake. That is exactly the point. During the debate on the bill, here is what was said: "To those who say the bill would end Medicare as we know it, our answer is: We certainly hope so. Old-fashioned Medicare isn't very good."

Well, I disagree and I have talked to many seniors in Tennessee who disagree as well. Medicare in the past 38 years has been very good to millions of seniors, but it should be even better. It should include a prescription drug benefit that is guaranteed, that is affordable, and that is accessible to all seniors. Our seniors deserve it, and we in this House Chamber should demand it.

Mr. Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DAVIS) and ask unanimous consent that he be allowed to control the time.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. TAUZIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 15 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GREEN) on behalf of the Committee on Ways and Means and ask unanimous consent that he be permitted to control that time.

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

There was no objection.