

Last year, when H.R. 5, the so-called "HEALTH" Act, was considered in the Energy and Commerce Committee, I offered an amendment to ensure that any savings from the bill's caps on damages for patient pain and suffering would be passed along to doctors in the form of reductions in their liability insurance premiums. This would directly protect innocent doctors from the impact of rising insurance rates brought about by negligence, while increasing the likelihood that consumers would see some benefit from caps. The Republican side defeated my amendment.

I asked the Rules Committee to make my amendment in order so that we could have a full and open debate on it during Floor consideration, but the Republicans refused to make my amendment in order.

This year, the Republican Majority went one step further—not only did Republicans refuse to make my amendment in order, they completed bypassed the Committee process altogether, ramming this bill right to the House Floor without any hearings and without any opportunity to amend it in Committee.

The amendment I offered last year in Committee established the "missing link" in this bill between liability caps and lower premiums for physicians. It would have balanced the competing interests in a way that would allow some progress on this issue. But balance does not seem to be what the Republican leadership is looking for. Instead, they bring forward a bill that no one can amend at all and which blames rising premiums on the victims of medical errors by capping their damages for pain and suffering, while completely ignoring the effect that insurers' own bad business decisions have on the high cost of premiums.

Such a slanted, one-dimensional view of the problem is bad for doctors and bad for patients. Without any guarantee that savings from the bill's cap on damages will go to doctors—not the insurance industry—this bill deserves to be defeated. Someday, we will see a majority in this Congress that is willing to go to bat for consumers and doctors alike to reduce the soaring cost of providing good medicine, instead of handing out "discount cards" that are becoming a license to raise prices across the board. Sadly, that day has not yet arrived.

I urge my colleagues to reject this harmful bill. Put the interests of physicians and patients above insurance company profiteering. Vote "No" on H.R. 4280.

DEPLORING ABUSE OF PERSONS IN UNITED STATES CUSTODY IN IRAQ

SPEECH OF

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 6, 2004

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and good friend, the gentleman from Massachusetts for yielding me this time. At seven in the morning today, he and I, and the other members of the Committee on Rules, met to discuss this resolution.

Once again, the Republican majority has determined to use the Committee on Rules to frustrate the democratic procedures.

Once again, the Republican Party has stifled debate and offered a closed rule.

As America commits itself to promoting Democracy in Iraq, the Republican majority in the House of Representatives, for partisan purposes, refused to allow an open debate on this most important issue.

It is as if the Republican majority starts and ends every Congressional session, which is broadcast live by C-SPAN, by saying, "Please do not try this at home." Today, again, they set exactly the wrong example of how to proceed democratically.

I condemn these horrible acts, and would have supported a resolution that properly and sincerely addressed the horrors that took place in Iraq. I believe that such a resolution could have come to the House floor under unanimous consent, and would have enjoyed full bipartisan support.

Now, it is important for us to recognize that the American military has no peers. It is also important for us to recognize that the absolute, overwhelming, great majority of the men and women in the military are not the kind of people that are now being investigated, and are not the kind of people that would commit these abuses.

I, for once, will not allow the offensive acts of a few to stain the service of more than 300,000 American men and women who have risked their lives for freedom. Our military has worked too hard and accomplished too much to be stained by the actions of a few.

That said, in a society committed to civil and human rights like ours, there is no place for the sorts of atrocities that occurred in Iraq. No American would allow for this kind of conduct. Everyone feels awful that this occurred and deplores the abuses of persons in America's custody in Iraq.

However, this resolution does not say what I think it should say. It condemns the abuse, but presents unacceptable omissions and inexcusable political provisions. Therefore, the resolution needs to be amended.

First, I would have supported a resolution that condemned the abuses and sought accountability because I believe this to be a time for remorse and self-criticism.

We are a Nation used to pointing the finger elsewhere; now, the fingers of the international public are pointing—rightfully so—back at us. Therefore, we must harshly and steadfastly deal with these atrocities and hold responsible all those that have contributed to the abuses. I trust that we can do this together with our friends and allies, taking advantage of such international organizations as the United Nations and the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe that have experience and knowledge on how to fight and prevent human rights violations worldwide.

But, this resolution instead tries to change the subject and avoid the problems by bragging about the removal of Saddam Hussein. This is not a time to spin the bad news or play politics. And, this resolution is not the proper place to defend the mistaken decision of going to war in Iraq. I refuse to belatedly vote for the war in Iraq under the guise of a dishonest and untruthful title.

Second, I would have supported a resolution that made accountable all those whom, regardless of rank or party loyalty, contributed to a culture that condones human rights abuses. Ultimately, what happened in Iraq and its aftermath has been a failure of leadership

of the Commander in Chief, and a failure of leadership of the Department of Defense from Secretary Rumsfeld, and the resolution should have pointed this out.

More courageous leaders would have recognized their responsibility, faced up to the situation, and said, "the buck stops here." But, instead, those in the Bush Administration failed to do their jobs and give straight answers. And, the resolution of the Republican Congressional majority has been drafted to absolve the leadership of any blame.

We must take a good and hard look at the Bush Administration. I trust that justice and accountability will come for those who perpetrated abuse of Iraqi detainees, and those in the chain of command who failed to act upon learning of these appalling acts.

Third, I would have supported a resolution that loudly and strongly decried the fact that for too long the information regarding the abuses in Iraqi prisons was in the hands of military higher-ups who did not deem the oversight responsibilities of Congress important enough for them to bring the matter forward. Congress was not notified of the problems at Abu Ghraib prison, even though the Department of Defense had a report outlining the conditions there at least 3 months ago.

To conclude, it is unfortunate that this matter does not come to the floor under unanimous consent. It does have, as I pointed out this morning, a few flaws that could easily have been corrected had the majority determined that it was proper to do so.

I take this opportunity to apologize not only to the detainees but also to all others who likely feel that America has lost its moral authority.

Had this resolution been true to its title, "Deplored the Abuse of Persons in United States Custody in Iraq," I would vote in favor of it. However, for the above-mentioned reasons, I cannot support the legislation in question. I will vote nay as a patriot, and a human rights defender.

I oppose this resolution in its present form.

MIDDLE-CLASS ALTERNATIVE MINIMUM TAX RELIEF ACT OF 2004

SPEECH OF

HON. BETTY MCCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the more than 2 million taxpayers who are unfairly burdened by the alternative minimum tax.

The AMT was originally designed in 1969 to ensure that the wealthiest Americans would still pay a fair share of taxes. The AMT now burdens many middle income Americans in what was once envisioned as an alternative minimum tax has now become more of a mandatory maximum tax.

The AMT is not a technicality of significance to only a few bureaucrats and the tax lawyers. It is not a mere glitch, the repair of which would only help a handful of wealthy individuals. It is a system that affects 2.4 million families this year. By 2010, 30 million Americans will be faced with minimum tax liability.

Unfortunately, under the Republican bill today, AMT exemption would only be raised to

\$40,250 for single taxpayers and \$58,000 for married couple filing jointly in 2005. This would still leave 1 million families paying the AMT. Unlike other tax cuts being forced through by Republicans, this will only be a temporary 1-year fix. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that a true fix of the AMT would cost \$376 billion over 10 years. But Republicans have refused to pull back their tax cuts for the wealthy, which have created a \$3 trillion deficit, in order to pay for this essential middle class tax relief.

I ask unanimous consent to insert into the record an editorial from the May 10, 2004 Los Angeles Times highlighting the budget gimmicks being used to disguise the cost of AMT and other tax cuts.

Today Democrats bring to the House floor a true solution to the AMT problem. The Democratic substitute completely exempts married couple families with incomes under \$250,000 from the alternative minimum tax, providing tax relief to more than 10 million families.

The Democratic plan is fully paid for by cracking down on corporate tax shelters. Nearly two-thirds of corporations paid no tax at all in 2000 and this is an important step to ensuring that corporations pay their fair share while relieving middle class families from the unfair burden of the alternative minimum tax.

It is important that we act today to ensure average income Americans will not unfairly face the alternative minimum tax in 2005. However, I believe we should provide this relief in a fiscally responsible manner that will not burden future generations of Americans. I urge my colleagues in joining me today in support of real AMT relief.

[From the Los Angeles Times, May 10, 2004]

PRESTO!—IT'S DEFICIT MAGIC

Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan is increasingly testy about the perils of the federal budget deficit, warning Congress and the Bush administration last week that it poses "a significant obstacle to long-term stability." The higher the debt goes, the more the threat of inflation increases. That forces the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates, slowing economic growth. Friday's sunny job creation figures, though good news, also intensify pressure to raise rates.

The Congressional Budget Office projects a deficit of \$477 billion for 2004—and by 2013, a recent average college graduate will shoulder \$51,520 of the total national debt. The new \$25 billion request by the White House to underwrite the Iraq occupation will be on top of those projections. But Congress continues living in a fiscal house of mirrors, using gimmickry to disguise the cost of current and proposed tax cuts.

The mischief begins with the one-year curb on the so-called alternative minimum tax that the House approved Wednesday. If enacted, it will shield about 9 million individuals and families at a cost of \$17.8 billion to the Treasury. The AMT is a parallel tax system originally designed to prevent the wealthy from avoiding all income taxes. But because it was not indexed for inflation, middle-class taxpayers are falling within its limits. Indexing the tax makes sense, but not on top of the more reckless cuts already passed.

Now Congress seeks to have it both ways by relying on one-year extensions. It pretends at budget time that hundreds of billions of AMT dollars will be available over the next decade. Then it can turn around and extend AMT relief for another year.

The "marriage penalty" produces another sleight of hand. A tax code quirk often penalizes married couples when both spouses

work. Once again, relief is good in theory but lawmakers aren't honest about lost revenue. By pretending the AMT will be in effect, they assume for budgeting purposes that about half of the tax cuts the AMT is intended to provide for married couples will be canceled out. Dizzying as well as deceptive.

The congressional Joint Committee on Taxation estimates that if, as is likely, the AMT is curbed each year, the bill the House passed April 28 for marriage relief would cost \$204 billion over 10 years, not \$105 billion.

If Congress rolled back the parts of the tax cuts that benefit the most wealthy, changes to the AMT and marriage penalty could be considered, but cuts already enacted reduce federal taxes of households with incomes above \$1 million an average of \$123,600 in 2004. Over the next decade, interest payments on tax-cut debt will amount to all that the government spends on the departments of Education, Homeland Security, Interior, Justice and State.

The longer that lawmakers budget by fakery, the more they will inundate future generations with trillions in debt. Whom will those generations blame?

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 4279, PROVIDING FOR DISPOSITION OF UNUSED HEALTH BENEFITS IN CAFETERIA PLANS AND FLEXIBLE SPENDING ARRANGEMENTS; H.R. 4280, HELP EFFICIENT, ACCESSIBLE, LOW-COST, TIMELY HEALTHCARE (HEALTH) ACT OF 2004; AND H.R. 4281, SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH FAIRNESS ACT OF 2004

SPEECH OF

HON. C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 12, 2004

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Mr. Speaker, the rising cost of health care is running out of control. With these flexible savings accounts it allows employers to pay for health care not covered by their health plans. It is only right that left over funds be rolled over into next years accounts. I support this bill to help people pay for their health care coverage.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 4275, PERMANENT EXTENSION OF 10-PERCENT INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX RATE BRACKET

SPEECH OF

HON. JOHN LINDER

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 12, 2004

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this modified, closed rule, and thank my friend and colleague from the Rules Committee, Mr. SESSIONS, for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, this is a fair and traditional rule for legislation that amends the Internal Revenue Code, and I am pleased that the House will have the opportunity to consider the merits of the underlying legislation, H.R. 4275, as well as an amendment in the nature of a substitute from the Ranking Member of the Ways and Means Committee, Mr. RANGEL.

Mr. Speaker, this rule before the House, H. Res. 637, will give Members of the House an opportunity to consider legislation that will spur economic growth and save taxpayers money by providing tax relief for working Americans.

I also want to commend Mr. SESSIONS, my friend and colleague on the Rules Committee, for introducing this important legislation. H.R. 4275 would permanently preserve the 10-percent income tax bracket, which was created in the 2001 Bush tax cut in order to reduce the burden on working Americans. As a result of this tax relief, currently, the first \$7,000 of individuals and \$14,000 of couples' taxable income is taxed at 10-percent instead of 15-percent.

If we fail to enact H.R. 4275, tax brackets will revert to their pre-2001 levels at the end of this year. For example, the ten percent bracket's income limits would return to \$6,000 for individuals and \$12,000 for couples in 2005, causing 73 million working Americans to pay higher taxes next year.

Additionally, the ten percent bracket would disappear completely after 2010, and taxpayers could face an average tax increase of \$2,400 over the next decade.

Lastly, over 24 million low-income workers will be pushed into a higher tax bracket. Therefore, compared to 2004 levels, many individuals and businesses will face higher federal taxes if we fail to enact H.R. 4275.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this rule so that we may proceed to debate the underlying legislation.

SUPPORTING THE GOALS AND IDEALS OF THE PEACE OFFICERS MEMORIAL DAY

SPEECH OF

HON. JIM MATHESON

OF UTAH

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 11, 2004

Mr. MATHESON. Mr. Speaker, this week, we honor the dedicated service of law enforcement officers across America as law enforcement officers and their families will participate in the 16th Annual Candlelight Vigil at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial located in Washington, DC and other events that recognize and honor the work and sacrifice of officers throughout the country. The memorial is a monument of remembrance that has the names of 14,000 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty engraved on its surface.

In my home state of Utah, we are particularly fortunate to have a number of dedicated individuals working to protect our citizens.

These days, we all tend to focus on the armed forces, which are obviously a critical element of national defense. But it is also important to remember those on the front lines here at home. Local law enforcement officers need Congress' help to ensure that our streets stay safe for law-abiding citizens. That's why I support both the COPS grants and Byrne grants. I think that one of the best things the federal government can do for local law enforcement is to provide the tools for police officers to best carry out their duties.

Every single day, acts of heroism and valor are performed by police officers across our nation. We have made tremendous progress