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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. BURNS).

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,

May 4, 2004.

I hereby appoint the Honorable MAX BURNS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 20, 2004, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) for 5 minutes.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG DISCOUNT CARDS

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, this week seniors nationwide will begin to see how ineffective and confusing the Republican prescription drug legislation is. This week, seniors have the opportunity to sign up for a new prescription drug card that will provide supposed savings on prescription drug costs.

The program begins on June 1; and while the new Medicare law will not take effect until 2006, it is clear that these drug cards are being used as a

ploy to enroll beneficiaries into products sponsored by the private drug and insurance industry.

Mr. Speaker, while some seniors will be able to save on their medications when they use these cards, many will not. In fact, I believe these drugs cards are nothing more than window dressing, a weak attempt by the Bush administration to couch the true intent of this Medicare law.

As seniors will see in the upcoming weeks, there is no guaranteed discount from drug card sponsors. Medicare discount cards are being marketed as providing a 10 to 25 percent discount, but there is no requirement in the new law that card sponsors must offer any specific discount. The idea of any savings is merely an illusion. Prescription costs rose 17 percent alone last year and drug prices are reported to have increased dramatically between the beginning of the year and now, so any savings have been lost to drug cost inflation.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out secondly, there is no guarantee that a particular drug card will offer discounts on all of the medicines taken by seniors. Card sponsors are allowed to pick and choose which drugs will be discounted. In addition, card sponsors may change the discounted prices on medicines weekly.

The discounts on a seniors' medicine when advertised when he or she enrolled may change, but that senior will not be allowed to switch to a different card for one whole year. So imagine that, Mr. Speaker, a card sponsor can change prices any time they want, but seniors have to stick with the same drug card for an entire year.

There is also no guarantee access to any particular pharmacy. Each discount card sponsor will determine which pharmacies will offer the discount advertised with the card. A seniors' usual pharmacy may not participate in the card that he or she selects.

Finally, the final price paid for prescriptions will vary by pharmacy. Because pharmacies can change the prices they charge, seniors must check with each of their local participating pharmacies to find out which one offers the lowest price on the drugs covered under their card.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask, how are seniors supposed to decipher all of this information that I mentioned. You would hope they would be able to get it from the Department of Health and Human Services; but that agency is too busy these days producing commercials trying to sell the new prescription drug law, rather than providing reliable information that seniors can use. Consider that drug cards sponsors are now saying that information on the Health and Human Services Web site designed to help seniors shop for the right card contains false information.

Mr. Speaker, if Health and Human Services cannot get the information right, how can we expect seniors to decide which plans works best for them?

Mr. Speaker, seniors should carefully consider their options. Unfortunately, they must remember that the Bush administration and Congressional Republicans were more concerned about how this legislation would affect the pharmaceutical companies than they were about how it would affect America's seniors. Seniors should remember that Democrats continue our fight to lower prescription drug costs by giving the government the purchasing power of millions of seniors to negotiate drug costs and to allow safe reimportation of drugs from Canada and elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, I have said many times that this Medicare prescription drug law should simply be repealed and we should go back to the drawing board. This idea of having these discount cards is too confusing and it will not result in lower drug prices for seniors. Imagine that they have to wait another 2 years after that before the

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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Medicare law with the prescription drug benefit supposedly even comes into effect.

We should repeal the law, go back to the drawing board and come up with a prescription drug benefit that really helps senior citizens under Medicare, not this false and illusory drug card, the process which begins this week.

UNDOING HIDDEN TAXES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 20, 2004, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY) is recognized during morning hour debates.

Mr. DELAY. Mr. Speaker, the only thing confusing seniors are Democrats trying to confuse seniors about their ability to prescription drugs through a discount card. I think it is unfortunate that the Democrats have chosen confusion and misleading the seniors and getting lower prescription drugs as available to them through the new strengthening and improvement of the Medicare system.

Our Members have been home talking to seniors. To answer the question how will seniors be able to choose, our Members are home helping seniors go through the system and choosing the kind of discount card and the kind of program that best benefits them, rather than trying to confuse them.

But, Mr. Speaker, I came here to talk about something a little bit different.

Mr. Speaker, every year for 1,000 different reasons, and all of them our fault, American families are squeezed by the invisible grip of hidden taxes. These are laws and regulations, all of which are well intentioned, that cost our economy billions of dollars, billions of man hours and millions of new jobs.

In addition to income taxes, customers and consumers are stuck with regulatory compliance costs, litigation costs, interest payments on the national debt, and governmental waste, fraud and abuse. And all of these are eventually passed on to unsuspecting consumers in the form of higher prices.

This week the House will take up two bills specifically targeting some of those hidden taxes. The first of these will be the Middle Class Alternative Minimum Tax Relief Act from the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS).

This legislation will protect 11 million working families and individuals from the unintended consequences of the Democrat-designed AMT, a tax provision preventing the wealthy from dodging their tax liability through creative accounting. Unfortunately, many middle income families have so benefited from Republican tax relief in 2001 and 2003, that the AMT now considers them rich.

Now, while deep down many Democrats may indeed consider a family earning \$45,000 per year to be rich, the majority of the people in this country, and thankfully in this body, have a

more realistic view of 21st century economics.

The Simmons bill is the first step towards making sure that the AMT only applies to those people it was designed to cover, not working families just trying to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Also this week, Mr. Speaker, in the House we plan to take up the conference report on one of the strongest, most disciplined budgets Congress has passed in two decades. It meets our present and reemerging needs while holding a firm line on discretionary spending. By setting a course of fiscal responsibility even in a time of war, we are giving the American people an opportunity to grow our economy back into balance, thereby protecting them from any more hidden taxes in the future.

Mr. Speaker, for generations Americans have been saddled with taxes that are too high and a government that is not responsive enough. This week we will take two small steps toward solving both of those problems.

LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 20, 2004, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, we teach our children that promises matter. And they do. So what kind of message does it send to our children when the President promises to leave no child behind but then breaks that promise by failing to provide our children the resources they need to get a world class education.

The fact is the President's budget cuts education funding by \$9.4 billion. That is \$9.4 billion less than the President himself said we needed to leave no child behind. So the only standard we are holding the President to is the standards he himself agreed to in his own education bill.

If that is not a broken promise, I do not know what is. Of course, \$9.4 billion is just a dollar figure. But to the children who do not and will not get the resources they need, it is much more than that; 2.4 million children will not get the help with math and reading they need; 1.3 million children will not have access to after-school activities, but will instead be sitting at home or out in the street without supervision.

Other children will be denied enrollment in Head Start because the President froze its funding. And tens of thousands of students will lose the grant work studies or loans they need to pay for college. These are the human costs of President Bush's broken promises on education.

He promised to leave no child behind, but then turns around and leaves millions of children behind. What kind of priorities are these?

We Democrats want to do what we all agreed, Democrats and Republicans

alike, is the right thing for our children: Investing the resources to raise student achievements in core subjects like reading and math; demanding results and accountability from our schools; making sure our students have up-to-date textbooks and technology; providing after-school programs for every child that needs them; ensuring access to Head Start; increasing financial aid to college students and simplifying the application process and forms; increasing the maximum Pell grant; doubling the HOPE Scholarship and making the HOPE tax credit refundable; expanding assistance to minority-serving institutions.

I know these things are really important because I began my career in public service as a high school student. I did not care for the education I received in my public school. I might have been young, but I knew that was not right. So I fought to change that. I won a seat on the school board and won the funding so that every student who would attend that school would have a quality education.

What we do here makes a difference in the lives of students. I know. The promises we make here matter in the lives of children. I know. And the level of our commitment to education will, in many ways, determine our success as a Nation in the years ahead.

I believe in opportunity, in personal responsibility. But without providing a quality education to our students, we will not have those things. And if America is going to compete in the global marketplace of the jobs and commerce and technology of the future, we need a workforce that receives the best education available, not one taught on a shoestring budget.

Today there are students learning in trailers, in outdated buildings, literally falling apart, with leaky roofs and without adequate heat, using outdated textbooks and crowded schools where teachers have to pay for supplies out of their own salaries. We can do much better than that.

America cannot and should not settle for second or third best when it comes to educating our children. To do so, we need to make the investment now. Unfortunately, President Bush and the Republicans made promises but we are failing to keep them. We Democrats want to make sure all the children in our Nation get the world class education they deserve. If you give us that chance, we will deliver that promise.

VALUABLE MILITARY CHAPLAINS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 20, 2004, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, there are rumors that were coming out of the Pentagon, rumors that I believe are extremely troubling. Outsourcing our military chaplains is a very bad idea.