

all of that. And we know that as a result of this bill, we end up with a 17 percent premium increase.

So the vote was taken in the middle of the night when people were not paying attention. Members of Congress had their arms twisted and were made promises, with one Member of Congress reporting an attempted bribe, and we also know that come March, after this bill passed, that even though the drug benefit does not start until 2006, we find out that starting in March, the Federal Government and seniors whose premiums have gone up begin to pay a monthly payment to the Medicare HMOs.

In March 2004, Medicare HMOs were paid \$229 billion by taxpayers. In April of 2004, the Medicare HMOs were paid by taxpayers and Medicare beneficiaries through a premium increase of \$229 billion. In May, June, July, August, and September, every single month, taxpayers and Medicare beneficiaries have paid HMOs \$229 billion. Next month, November, December, and all of next year, the government and seniors will pay \$229 billion to the Medicare HMOs, and the drug benefit does not start until 2006.

There are 22 months of direct payments from seniors through an increased premium, and taxpayers, to the tune of billions of dollars, 22 months of \$229 billion a month payments to the insurance industry, insurance company HMOs, from seniors and taxpayers, even though the drug benefit does not start until 2006.

Mr. Speaker, you can see the perfect circle here. You can see that the bill was written by the drug and insurance industry with the President and the Vice President and Republican leaders. The drug and insurance industry get huge subsidies, much bigger profits, direct subsidies, with seniors paying a 17.4 percent premium increase, and taxpayers paying billions of dollars in order to pay off the insurance industry and the drug industry. And the completed circle ends this way: with the President and Republican leaders of this Congress getting tens of millions of dollars in campaign contributions from the drug and insurance industry.

It is corrupt, it is shameful, and it is morally reprehensible.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. MILLER of Michigan). The gentleman will refrain from improper references to the President and Vice President.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. What was that, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, I do not understand. I did not say the President. What did I say that was improper?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Improper references to the President and Vice President, whether by accusation or innuendo are not in order.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, I only said that the President and

Vice President sat down with the drug and insurance industry and wrote this bill, and I never said the President did anything illegal. I questioned that it was the right thing to do. Am I not allowed to say that, Madam Speaker?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman may not, even by innuendo, allege a quid pro quo between receipt of campaign contributions and public-policy decisions.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, I really just want to make sure I understand. So if the President wrote a bill with the drug and insurance industry, then by my saying that the drug and insurance industry gave money to the President's campaign, that is improper to say?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman's characterization of the process as corrupt conveyed the impression of undue influence.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, I was talking about the leadership of this Congress being corrupt by passing a Medicare bill the way they did.

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.)

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

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

THE THREE Rs

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

Mr. McDERMOTT. Madam Speaker, the three Rs used to stand for reading, writing and arithmetic. Now the three Rs stand for Republican rhetoric is not reality. Here is the proof.

Under this administration, Bermuda has become corporate America's favorite destination. And I am not talking about vacations. The Tax Code encourages and rewards U.S. companies to set up storefronts offshore to exploit their profits, with \$75 billion last year alone, and avoid U.S. taxes.

And if the administration has its way, it will get even worse. The armored trucks, loaded with U.S. corporate profits, will be lining up at the docks waiting to transfer the money out of our country. It is made to work that way. Policies by the administration and approved by the Republican House are costing the American people between \$10 billion and \$20 billion a year in exported tax revenue, money that should go for health care, education, senior citizens, and worker re-

training. The need is there but the revenue is somewhere else.

U.S. companies deserve to make a profit, but America deserves to have everyone pay their fair share to support the country that gave them the opportunity to make those profits. Indeed, the administration has put corporate interests ahead of America's interests. It is a double-edged sword and both sides are hurting the American people.

More corporate profits are being shifted offshore and more corporate expenses are being shifted on to the workers. Over the last 4 years, health care premiums paid by American workers have risen three times faster than the average earnings. Today, over 14 million Americans spend at least 25 percent of their earnings on health care costs.

And let me clarify something, Madam Speaker, before the Republican rhetoric kicks in. Those 14 million Americans, spending at least 25 percent of their earnings on health care, all of them are under the age of 65. It is the middle class, in other words, that is being struck under the burden of administration policies that put corporate interests ahead of America's interests.

Over the last 4 years, health care premiums in 26 States have risen more than 40 percent. What did the administration do in response? Reward the drug companies with more profits and renege on a promise to senior citizens. Americans today, old and young alike, are paying more and earning less. And Americans are going to be paying a lot more in the coming years.

When the administration exported the U.S. Treasury into the bank accounts of the rich, America was left holding an IOU that is a black hole on America's future. There is no way to see in it, through it, or out of it. Fully one-half of that massive deficit this year alone is a direct result of the administration's fiscal binge. They have created a mountain of debt and a mole hill of economic progress.

Despite the Republican rhetoric, the administration is short at least 100,000 jobs per month. Per month. Despite the Republican rhetoric, the American people know that. Consumer confidence was down again last month because people are not buying the administration's rhetoric. The number of consumers saying jobs are hard to come by went up. Consumers drive the U.S. economy. They are worried, and with good reason. The number of people living in poverty is up. The number of people without health care coverage is up. The number of people who have exhausted long-term employment benefits is dramatically up.

And then, Madam Speaker, there is Iraq. Escalating casualties, chaos, and crisis lead the President to conclude things are getting better. That must explain why over one-third of former soldiers called up this month and ordered to report for active duty in Iraq have not shown up.

Americans can tell the difference between a photo op in the Rose Garden and a reality check in Iraq. Things are not getting better. At every opportunity to talk straight to the American people, the administration has chosen to sacrifice credibility in hopes of perpetuating its story. Trouble is, the real story about Iraq is every night on the news. The administration can try and change the rhetoric, but the American people are not changing the channel. They know what they see and read. They know it is not what the administration claims. They know that only new leadership will solve the crisis in Iraq and revive the economy at home.

The administration had its chance, again and again and again and again. The rhetoric got better, even as the reality got worse, and even as we went further into debt, and even though the debt is the biggest we have ever had in our history in 1 year. That is the choice facing America. Believe the administration's rhetoric about Iraq and the economy, or elect JOHN KERRY to take care of reality.

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

(Mr. VAN HOLLEN 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 Ohio (Mr. RYAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. RYAN of Ohio 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 gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

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

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, last week, a number of members of the Congressional Black Caucus, myself included, addressed the issue of upcoming elections, with particular attention going to voter intimidation, oppression, and suppression. I congratulate

the Congressional Black Caucus, and particularly the leadership of our chair, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS), for making Americans aware of this very serious issue.

The sad truth is that in every election since reconstruction, in every election since the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965, voters, and particularly African Americans and other minorities, have faced calculated and determined efforts at intimidation and suppression, both above and below the Mason-Dixon line, indeed throughout the Nation.

It appears that the upcoming national elections will not break that pattern. In an article on the op-ed page of Monday's Washington Post, former President Jimmy Carter states the following: "The disturbing fact is that a repetition of the problems of 2000 now seems likely, even as many other nations are conducting elections that are internationally certified to be transparent, honest, and fair."

President Carter cites two significant requirements for free and fair elections. First, standards that the State of Florida still fails to meet. The first is a nonpartisan electoral commission or a trusted and nonpartisan official who will be responsible for organizing and conducting the electoral process. And the second requirement is uniformity in voting procedures so that all citizens, regardless of their social or financial status, have equal assurance that their votes are cast in this same way and will be tabulated with equal accuracy.

Madam Speaker, as many of my colleagues know, President Carter is not speaking off the cuff when it comes to election monitoring. The world renowned Carter Center has monitored more than 50 elections around the world, many under difficult and dangerous circumstances. When it comes to certifying that elections are free and fair, the Carter Center is the gold standard. People listen and they take note.

They listen and take note, it appears, everywhere in the world but here in the United States.

President Carter is dead-on target in stating that "It is unconscionable to perpetuate fraudulent or biased electoral practices in any nation. It is especially objectionable among our Americans, who have prided ourselves on setting a global example for pure democracy."

That is why I introduced House Resolution 793, a sense of Congress resolution, condemning all efforts to suppress and intimidate voters in the United States and reaffirming that the right to vote is a fundamental right of all eligible United States citizens.

□ 2000

The resolution also urges States to replace decade-old election machinery with less error-prone equipment before the November 2004 national elections; calls upon all States to institute a

moratorium on the erection of roadblocks or identity checkpoints designed to racially profile voters on Election Day, and calls upon the Attorney General to vigorously monitor all credible allegations of voter intimidation and suppression and to expeditiously prosecute all offenders to the full extent of the law.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 793 is a simple resolution that reaffirms the most basic right of every American, the right to vote and have their vote counted. This is not a partisan issue. It is not a Democrat or Republican issue, and I would note, however, that not one single Member on the other side of the aisle has cosponsored this resolution.

Can anyone take comfort in conducting elections under flawed circumstances that depart from the principles of fair and equal treatment? Can anyone condone an election that perpetuates fraudulent or biased electoral practices? I certainly hope that our Nation's noble experiment in democracy has not.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I want to briefly address another issue of voter inequity. This past weekend I held a voter awareness workshop in my congressional district for ex-offenders. It is a model for the rest of the Nation, and I would hope that we would look to letting ex-offenders exercise their right to vote after they have served their time and paid their debt to society.

Last week, a number of members of the Congressional Black Caucus, myself included, addressed the issue of the upcoming elections, with particular attention given to voter intimidation, oppression, and suppression. I congratulate the Congressional Black Caucus, and particularly the leadership of our Chair, Congressman ELIJAH CUMMINGS, for making Americans aware of this very serious issue.

The sad truth is that in every election since Reconstruction, in every election since the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965, voters—and particularly African-Americans and other minorities—have faced calculated and determined efforts at intimidation and suppression, both above and below the Mason-Dixon Line, indeed throughout the Nation.

It appears that the upcoming national elections will not break that pattern. In an article on the op-ed page of Monday's Washington Post, former President Jimmy Carter states the following, and I quote: "The disturbing fact is that a repetition of the problems of 2000 now seems likely, even as many other nations are conducting elections that are internationally certified to be transparent, honest and fair."

President Carter cites two significant requirements for free and fair elections—standards that the State of Florida still fails to meet: The first is "a nonpartisan electoral commission or a trusted and nonpartisan official who will be responsible for organizing and conducting the electoral process"; and, the second requirement is "uniformity in voting procedures, so that all citizens, regardless of their social or financial status, have equal assurance that their votes are cast in the same way and will be tabulated with equal accuracy."

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