

then for goodness sake we can find \$1.3 billion to take care of our soldiers and their families.

If we do not do this, what kind of message are we sending to the brave men and women who have served this country? I hope Members on both sides of the aisle will join me in this effort and that the President himself will see fit to support it as well.

THE PROTECTION OF LAWFUL COMMERCE IN ARMS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell my colleagues about a piece of legislation that I have put in; it is called the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act. My cosponsor is Congressman RICK BOUCHER.

Last year we introduced a very similar piece of legislation, and it passed, my colleagues, with overwhelming bipartisan support. Our bill has the support of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Association of Wholesalers, among other prominent groups.

What this legislation does is stops baseless lawsuits against gun manufacturers or dealers, based upon the criminal or unlawful third-party misuse of firearms.

Now, some may ask the question, why do we need such legislation? The reason that we need it is because the firearms industry is under attack. Over the last few years, trial lawyers have filed suits against federally licensed firearm manufacturers across this country in the hopes of bankrupting this industry.

They have been filing frivolous lawsuits that are based on the dubious premise, Mr. Speaker, that gun manufacturers should be held liable for the actions of others who use their products in a criminal or unlawful manner.

In other words, if someone gets a gun and then commits a crime with it, these litigious gun-control advocates believe that gunmakers should be held liable for the damages or injuries that are caused.

Now, that is like holding a car company responsible if a driver gets drunk, gets reckless, and hits someone with a vehicle. A law abiding manufacturer has a constitutional right to engage in interstate commerce without the fear of these frivolous lawsuits. I do not care if it is a business that makes guns, cigarettes, cars, fast food or whatever it is, although firearms are the only product that I have listed here which specifically has constitutional protection under the second amendment.

Over 30 cities and counties, in addition to various individuals, have sued the gun industry since 1998. I am pleased to note that many of these cases have been completely, com-

pletely dismissed in various city, State, and Federal courts. In fact, just a few days ago San Francisco, based in California, the appellate court there unanimously upheld a superior court decision dismissing lawsuits filed by Los Angeles, San Francisco, and 12 other California municipalities against members of the firearms industry. I welcome this decision.

However, there are still several lawsuits pending which threaten to devastate the industry. In New York City, recently enacted legislation allows victims of crime to sue the dealers and gunmakers. We also must consider that just the mere threat of these suits, taking the first couple of legal steps to defend these suits can be enough on their own to force some of the smaller companies out of business.

As one prominent person said of this tactic, we are going to make the gun industry die a death by a thousand cuts. So our legislation will end these coercive and undemocratic lawsuits.

Now, I understand there are some of my colleagues that may be hesitant to support my bill since the media and gun control advocates have spent years and millions of dollars vilifying the firearms industry. No one wants to be seen granting the industry special treatment or helping them to get away with something, or so it is perceived.

I have two responses to this. First, the firearms industry has been around and has been respected for generations. They provide a valuable service and a highly desirable product to millions of sportsmen and supporters of those second amendment rights. They provide our law enforcement agencies and our officers with the tools necessary to fight crime in our neighborhoods, and they enable our Armed Forces to protect our freedoms around the world.

The industry employs thousands of hard-working Americans and these Americans support their families like everybody else. These employees and their businesses pay taxes. It is an indisputable fact that the firearms industry has contributed immensely to our society over the years in a very positive way. But this does not mean that if one of these manufacturers purposely or recklessly sold a bad product they should be given a free pass. No, we are not saying that.

Our legislation is very narrowly tailored to allow suits against any bad actor to proceed. It includes carefully crafted exceptions to allow legitimate victims their day in court for cases involving defective firearms, breaches of contract, criminal behavior by a gunmaker or seller, or the negligent entrustment of a firearm to an irresponsible person.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I am honored once again to introduce this commonsense bill, and I urge all of my colleagues to join with me in co-sponsoring this piece of legislation.

BUDGET PRIORITIES AND MORAL VALUES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, last week President Bush delivered to Congress his proposed Federal budget. In the coming months, Democrats and Republicans in Congress will debate budget proposals largely based on divergent cardinal moral values.

We will debate budget cuts that represent more than just program scale-backs. The President's proposed cuts to vital government programs are reflective of differences in core philosophies on the role of our government in serving our people.

Budgets are moral documents that reveal the fundamental priorities of a person, of a household, of a business, of a government. The President's "every man for himself budget" disregards millions of Americans and undercuts our Nation's values. There is no better example of where Democrat and Republican values diverge than in Medicaid.

The President claims he only wants to cut programs that are not getting results or that duplicate current efforts or that do not fulfill essential priorities.

Democrats could not agree more on the need for efficient government. That is how we balanced the budget in the 1990s. So we asked then, which of those three, Mr. President, is Medicaid?

There is no question it is getting results. It operates at a lower cost than private health insurance. The fact is, private health insurance has grown historically at 12.6 percent a year. Medicare has grown at 7.1 percent a year. Medicaid has grown at 4.5 percent a year.

The public sector does it more efficiently and delivers to more people fairly than does private insurance. And there is no duplication here. It is the only program of its kind. It fulfills an essential priority. Medicaid is the sole source of nursing home care for 5 million seniors living in poverty.

The President knows Medicaid is already running on fumes, but he made a choice. He chose to give more tax cuts to the most privileged 1 percent of people in this country instead of providing for subsistence care for senior citizens in need, different priorities reflecting a different set of moral values.

Medicaid provides health coverage to 52 million Americans, roughly in my State of Ohio 1.7 million people. It is the only source of coverage for one out of four children in our Nation, and it provides 70 percent of the nursing home funding in most States.

The Bush proposal cuts \$60 billion out of the Medicaid program over the next 10 years, again so that the President could deliver to his biggest contributors the tax cut for the wealthiest 1 or 2 or 5 percent. These cuts, in effect, will mean kicking some seniors

out of nursing homes. The President's plan would shift tens of billions of costs to States like Ohio already facing severe financial shortfalls.

The President cannot eliminate basic needs by ignoring them. He cannot eliminate the need for nursing home care by ignoring it or by shifting the responsibility to the States. In the short run, his budget cuts will create victims. In the long run, it will force the States to spend more. And how will the States cover these costs?

The States will levy taxes on students through tuition, homeowners through higher property taxes, workers through higher income taxes, consumers through higher sales tax. That is what is happening in State after State, whether it is controlled by Republicans or Democrats, as we cut those programs. Nationally, the States pick them up so the wealthy get their tax breaks, the wealthiest 1 or 2 or 5 percent, and middle-income people get hit hardest by, again, students through higher tuition, consumers through sales tax, and property homeowners by the property tax, and workers through higher income taxes.

Medicaid is a partnership between Federal and State governments. Cutting the Federal share hurts our families, hurts our communities, hurts our schools, hurts our country.

We can give up many things in the name of shared sacrifice, but common sense should not be one of them.

The President's "every man for himself budget" neglects our Nation's values, neglects our communities, and betrays our Nation's values.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BRADLEY) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Mr. Speaker, today I rise with pleasure in support of the administration's budget proposal for our Nation's community health centers. I would also note that community health centers have received bipartisan support over the years.

These health care organizations provide an essential function in all of our districts, and I believe that they are one of the most effective entities in delivering quality care to low-income populations at cost-effective prices.

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In my State of New Hampshire alone, over 81,000 citizens received treatment at a community health center in 2004. A substantial portion of these patients, over one-third, were uninsured. The administration has been cognizant of the impact of community health centers, pledging to add 1,200 new centers between 2001 and 2006. The budget released last week completes this commitment and has resulted in increased

access to health services for Americans throughout our country.

Community health centers provide vital outreach services to individuals who may otherwise not have access to the care they need. These services include educational campaigns to raise awareness of preventative options in health care such as health screenings and nutritional campaigns. By educating individuals about primary care options, community health centers are able to both improve the quality of life and restrain health care costs.

Dental and behavioral health care services are also critical to the populations served by community health centers. The medical staff of these organizations are often the front line for establishing quality dental health habits and responding to mental health needs as they develop. An established hallmark of community health centers is their ability to intervene in health problems before they become crises.

One of the goals of community health centers is to establish partnerships with local community leaders and coalitions. These individuals and groups are acutely aware of the pulse and the needs of the community and can effectively advocate for appropriate outreach and medical services. The ability of a health organization to understand its community is essential in bringing tailored, efficient, and effective care to the people it serves. It is clear that community health centers are adept at gaining this insight, in turn benefiting all Americans.

As my colleagues can see, community health centers play a vital role in the delivery of care in our communities. Too often, low-income or uninsured patients delay receiving treatment due to the costs, and then they are ultimately forced to receive care at the health industry's most costly access point, which is the emergency room. Community health centers provide quality primary care to patients, often resulting in the prevention of unnecessary ailments. This results in a cost savings to all health care facilities and subsequently yields lower health insurance premiums for Americans. Community health centers have demonstrated that they have a positive effect on both the health and economic well-being of their communities, and indeed our Nation, as a whole.

In particular, I would like to congratulate Lampsey Health Center of Newmarket, New Hampshire, and Ann Peters and her fantastic staff for their service to the people's health care needs in that region of my State. Their efforts and those of their colleagues are particularly noteworthy and worthy of commendation.

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES ON THE ASSASSINATION OF EX-PRIME MINISTER RAFIK HARIRI

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PETRI). Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gen-

tleman from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAHOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer heartfelt sympathy to the people of Lebanon and to the many, many leaders of that country who have suffered a great loss yesterday with the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri.

Over the last 10 years, I have had the opportunity to visit the small country of Lebanon. I have taken an interest in the country because of my Lebanese heritage and the fact that Lebanon needs a few advocates in the House of Representatives, and I have tried to be a strong advocate for this small country.

During the 10 years that I have visited Lebanon, I had the opportunity to become well acquainted with Prime Minister Hariri. Over the 10 years that I have had a chance to visit Lebanon, I have seen the country rebuilt almost literally by the Prime Minister and his efforts and his resources in not only bringing people together but using many of his own resources, certainly, to rebuild the city of Beirut.

Prior to the war, the city of Beirut was known as the Paris of the Middle East. Today, and what happened yesterday, will not only really hurt that opportunity for Beirut to continue to have that kind of a beauty because of what happened yesterday, it will also hurt our opportunities to bring about peace in that region of the world.

Prime Minister Hariri did so much for the country and, in particular, for the city of Beirut. Ten years ago, there were many, many burnt-out buildings. Today, there are many beautiful hotels and condominiums, and the center of the city has a project known as Solidare that the Prime Minister took a great deal of interest in in really rebuilding the business center and creating a business center in downtown Beirut.

He was also responsible for helping over 2,000 students a year by giving them scholarships so that they could attend universities and colleges all over the Middle East and also here in this country. His foundation in this country has been very, very generous. His presence in the country will be sorely missed. He was one who did try and bring about peace, did try and bring people together, did rebuild the country and rebuild the city of Beirut and, in that essence, tried to forge a peace among Nations in that region of the world.

I know for his family this is a terrible loss, and I know for the people of Lebanon it is a terrible loss, and I know for the people of the region, it is a terrible loss.

We will probably never know who those terrorists were who decided to snuff out his life. I hope that at some time we will be able to find them, but for now we say to the Prime Minister's family, to the people of Lebanon, you have suffered a great loss, we have suffered a great loss, those of us that have