thirds of the time you call 1–800 Medicare you get correct information.

That means one-third of the time you do not. So we are not penalizing the administration for not being able to get this law up and running correctly. Nobody has lost their job over that. But we are going to penalize seniors who have not made up their mind because of this confusing law, because they were getting wrong information from the 1–800 Medicare number that we talk about on the floor.

We are going to charge seniors as much as a 7 percent penalty for the rest of their lives if they do not get this together by November.

Mr. Speaker, a Republican pharmacist in my district said to me, he said, ''President Bush might as well have handed a blank legal pad to the drug industry and said write this new Medicare law.''

Congress and the President wrote a confusing plan at the behest of the HMOs and the drug companies, and then Congress and the President are saying that seniors should have to pay a penalty, seniors in Cincinnati and Dayton and Columbus and Toledo and Mansfield and Chillicothe and all over my State and all over Connecticut and all over Georgia and all over Minnesota have to pay a penalty because the drug industry and the HMOs and those lobbyists in Washington got this Congress to write a law like that. That hardly seems fair.

Mr. Speaker, I would just ask my friends on the other side of the aisle, please ask President Bush to extend this deadline so seniors do not have to pay a penalty for this very confusing new drug law.

Mr. DEAL of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of our time.

Mr. Speaker, this has indeed been an interesting debate. Here we are having people who did not vote for the bill who for 40 years controlled this House and kept saying to seniors, we are going to provide you with a drug benefit and never delivered.

The Republicans delivered. They did not like the bill. They still do not like the bill. Now they say they do not want a deadline, but the bill that they drafted had a March 1 cutoff with penalties following that.

Ours is more generous than that. The purpose of today's debate is to simply remind seniors, this is a voluntary program. If you want to sign up you should do so before May 15.

The confusion, yes, there is confusion because there are a lot of choices out there. Our friends on the other side of the aisle said this will not work and nobody will have any choices. The truth of the matter is, there probably are maybe too many choices, but it is better to have choices than none at all.

Mr. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, rather than bringing legislation to the House floor that would actually help senior citizens get the prescription drugs they need and address some of the problems that they are having with the new drug benefit, the Republican leadership has brought forward an ''advertisement'' in the form of a meaningless resolution that does nothing, absolutely nothing, to make it easier for seniors to enroll in the prescription drug plan.

Instead, they are encouraging our constituents to beat an artificial deadline and enroll in these plans without having accurate information to prevent them from enrolling in a plan that does not meet their needs.

The independent Government watchdog agency, the Government Accountability Office, recently reported that a good deal of the information that Medicare is providing on this new drug benefit is wrong or incomprehensible to the average beneficiary. For example, Medicare representatives gave an incorrect answer 60 percent of the time when they were asked to help a beneficiary find the lowest-cost plan to enroll in.

These findings also point to larger problems. Because of inaccurate, complicated, or confusing information, seniors have not been given a fair shake. Why is the House not addressing these matters?

We should be here today voting on a bill to extend the May 15 deadline and helping seniors avoid an unfair and unnecessary penalty. Instead, we have a meaningless resolution encouraging seniors to do exactly what they have been doing, which is to evaluate their options. I encourage that—so I will support the resolution. But we should be doing much more to help seniors.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. DEAL) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 802.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. DEAL of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MCCARTHY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PRESCRIPTION DRUG DEADLINE

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take her place since she is not here.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to talk about a serious issue facing America's seniors, an issue that was just debated prior on the floor, the upcoming deadline for enrolling in the new Medicare prescription drug program.

I, like many of my colleagues, have held forums around our congressional districts to try and encourage the senior citizens to enroll in the program and to try and help explain it with the help of advisers from Medicare, from the Kaiser health care organization in my district, from the county health care offices and many others to explain the process of enrolling, the benefits, and what the seniors need to get together to do that.

But the problem is that time is going to run out on many of these seniors. There is just 5 days left to enroll in the program or face the possibility of a lifetime penalty. Most seniors do not fully understand the nature of that penalty, that that penalty will be assessed on the value of the average premium paid, and it will be assessed for the rest of the time that the senior is enrolled in the program.

It is a serious and a harsh penalty for those who may not be able to sign up, because they simply failed to understand the program and need additional time. We have been pressing the Congress and the President and the Republicans in this House to extend the enrollment deadline and to waive the penalty for the first year to give people enough time to understand the confusing and complicated program.

Instead the Republicans have brought up this resolution that was just passed here that encourages the beneficiaries not yet enrolled to enroll in the drug plan and to review carefully all of the options available to them.

Many have been trying to do that and have not been able to do it successfully to completion. I do not believe that they should be punished for that. We are talking about individuals who in many cases have other disabilities, other problems, health care problems, and it is not easy to wade through these options that confuse many of them.

This resolution does not do anything to help those individuals avoid the lifetime penalties. It does not give the Federal Government the power to negotiate in bulk for the drug companies and for lower prescription prices.

Instead of passing this resolution, I would have hoped that the Republicans would have brought forth a provision to provide real help to the beneficiaries by giving them more time to review carefully all of the options that are available and delaying the deadline until May 31.

Why, you ask, is this necessary? On April 26, USA Today reported less than 3 weeks remain for most Medicare

beneficiaries to sign up for the prescription drug coverage without penalties, but nearly half the Nation's seniors do not know it.

The fact is that many beneficiaries are still unaware of the deadlines and the penalties, highlighting the fact that more time is needed. But even those who know about the deadlines and penalties are having a hard time with this confusing law. A new GAO report found that many beneficiaries are receiving inadequate, incorrect information from the Medicare hotline that many of us have been encouraging them to call to help them enroll.

It has been inadequate help to them and seniors should not be punished for that reason. The Wall Street Journal reported just a couple of days ago that the Federal investigators from the GAO posing as senior citizens found that the Medicare operators routinely failed to give callers accurate and complete information about the government's new drug benefit.

□ 2000

Investigators said that about one-third of their calls resulted in faulty responses or no response at all because of disconnected calls. This is not an atmosphere which should lead to the punishment of senior citizens who are making a good-faith effort to reach Medicare, to reach for the enrollment, to understand the program and make the decision for themselves or a member of their families on a timely basis.

Based upon a new analysis, there are probably about nine million beneficiaries with little or no drug coverage who still have failed to sign up. According to the nonpartisan CBO, delaying the deadline to December 31 would save more than 7 million beneficiaries from a lifetime of higher monthly premiums.

If the Republicans were truly interested in fulfilling the program that they designed, then they ought to extend the deadline so that senior citizens that we represent can have an opportunity to enroll and put off that penalty.

So I would hope—there is still time between now and the 15th, I would hope that now that they have passed this resolution, we would bring out legislation to provide an extension of time for seniors who are in fact acting in good faith.

The suggestion has not been made that seniors are trying to dodge the obligation. We know why there is a penalty. Eventually you want them all to sign up so people do not selectively enroll and cherry-pick and make the program more complex. But the indication is not that seniors are refusing or trying to dodge the program. The indication is that many are still reaching out in good faith to sign up for the program and to understand the program, but they just have not been successfully able to do that.

It seems to me that is not what a government should be doing is punishing people going through the process in good faith, but simply have not been able to negotiate it.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. INGLIS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I request unanimous consent that I be allowed to claim the time of the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I rise on the House floor tonight to talk about something that I think is one of the big solutions that we need to pursue here in the United States. And I would like to, first of all, talk about this first chart; and hopefully, Members can see it back in their offices. But this is a chart of the imports of petroleum as we have seen it from 1984 until 2005.

Back in 1984, we were importing less than 5.5 million barrels of oil a day; today, that number is over 13.5. In fact, I should say in 2005 it was about 13.5 million barrels a day. This is a scary chart because the direction is heading in the wrong direction.

Let's put some numbers on this. I am told that by this summer with $70-a-barrel oil, we will be spending about a billion dollars a day to buy oil from countries, in many cases who are not particularly friendly to the United States. This is a serious problem. It is a challenge to our economic security and it is a challenge to our national security.

Now, renewable fuels are only part of the solution. I voted to increase the CAFE standards. I think conservation is an important part of solving our energy problems here in the United States. I believe in developing other kinds of energy. I voted consistently to develop the oil and the natural gas which we know is up in Alaska. I voted to expand the many uses of other energies.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have not talked enough about, in my opinion, is our ability to grow more of our own energy. And so tonight I want to talk about renewable energy in general and ethanol in particular because I think there is huge misunderstanding, and it is not just among Members of Congress and the general public, it is among many of the policymakers even in the Department of Energy.

Mr. Speaker, there is still a misunderstanding about how much it costs to produce ethanol. In fact, we had a hearing of the Science Committee about 6 months ago. We had three top energy experts who testified before the committee. I asked all of them, I said, How much does it cost to produce a gallon of ethanol? Well, they started to look at their watches and their shoes and it was clear they did not want to answer the question.

Well, I said, make a guess. And the low guess, and these are energy experts, the low guess among those three experts was $2 a gallon. The high estimate was $3 a gallon. And I said, Would it surprise you to know that we are actually producing ethanol in Minnesota for less than $1.20 a gallon? In fact, some of the plants at that time with lower natural gas prices were actually producing ethanol for about $1 a gallon.

Today, with corn at about $2 is a bushel and with oil at about $70 a barrel, the cost right now to produce a gallon of ethanol at an efficient plant in the upper Midwest is about $1.20 a gallon. Gasoline, on the other hand, right now costs about $2.10 a gallon for unleaded gas.

Now, I have to be clear, though, and we want to be fair in this discussion. You do not get as many Btus, British Thermal Units, out of a gallon of ethanol as you do a gallon of unleaded gasoline. In fact, it is about 20 to 25 percent less. So you get less energy out of a gallon, partly because ethanol is 35 percent oxygen. That is good, though, because it means it burns much cleaner than gasoline.

Ethanol is better for our environment. It is better for our economy because that billion dollars a day that we may be spending this summer we are sending to countries that in some respects do not like us, and in worst cases they may be using part of that oil revenue to actually fund the terrorists.

The beauty of producing energy here in the United States, clean-burning ethanol in the United States, is that all of that money stays here in America where it recycles through our own economy. A new plant, for example, recently opened just west of Mankato, Minnesota, in the little town of Lake Crystal, Minnesota, and they told us they will be employing, on average, 42 workers in that plant, and the average starting wage will be somewhere over $16 an hour plus benefits. These are good jobs that help our own economy right here in the United States.

But the point really needs to be made, not only is it better for our economy, it is better for our environment, but it is actually cheaper. So some people say, well, if it is better for the economy, if it is better for the environment and it is cheaper, why is more of it not available?

Well, the answer is simply this. The oil companies do not make any money on ethanol. I am not here to say that