

to serve our country. Instead, this budget request maintains and grows weapons systems that are no use to our troops on the ground, rather than adding the manpower we need for Iraq and Afghanistan, and reduces the authorized size of the National Guard by 17,000 soldiers.

I did not hear a renewed commitment to fully fund our veterans health care either. When someone serves and is injured we owe them a debt to make sure they receive health care second to none. President Bush's VA budget request for 2007 does add nearly \$3 billion in real appropriations to veterans health care compared to the 2006 budget. However, it does so by charging a new annual enrollment fee for VA care, nearly doubling drug copayments and driving 1.2 million veterans out of the system created specifically for them.

A chart in the President's budget request anticipates approximately 1.2 million fewer veterans in Priority Groups 7 and 8 in 2007. These groups are forced in this budget request to pay new \$250 enrollment fees and nearly double in pharmaceutical co-payments. This is not looking out for those who have served our country.

The President touched briefly on health care problems in our country. Health care is the number one domestic concern of the American people, 46 million of whom lack health insurance.

The administration's solution is expanding health savings accounts, HSAs, eliminating State mandates on health insurance policies, and the annual call to federalize medical malpractice lawsuits. HSAs have not been successful with consumers. An October, 2005, report determined that 1 percent of U.S. adults chose HSAs and only one-third of that 1 percent recommend HSAs to someone else. Another one-third of that percent would like to change plans. HSAs only fit a small portion of our society and have not helped to ensure our 46 million uninsured Americans.

Even worse, HSAs will draw healthier, higher income employees out of health insurance pools, leaving the sicker and lower income folks to share the higher risk. The unfortunate result would be increased out-of-pocket costs for those most in need of affordable health care and a weakened employer-based health insurance system.

To solve our health problems, we need bolder leadership, not plans that do not work. Let us expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the CHIP program, to working parents, allow early retirees over 55 to buy into Medicare, and help States with Medicaid costs so that they can expand programs for the uninsured.

Decades ago our country made a decision to use employer-based insurance unlike other industrial democracies. We have tried to bridge the gap of what employers can provide, but we still have 46 million people uninsured. Congress and the administration have a duty to bridge that gap for Americans.

I also did not hear anything in the State of the Union Speech about the administration's efforts to secure pensions. Companies are eliminating traditional pensions or going into bankruptcy to get out of commitments to their employees. At a time when the baby boomer generation is reaching retirement age, we cannot depend on Social Security, especially with an administration who wants to privatize it.

The President also did not mention anything on the biggest issues facing Americans, increasing disparity in income. Since World War II, Americans had a history of creating a great middle income majority. We are losing that great middle class as we have more and more millionaires but more and more poor people.

In 2001, the median income in 2004 dollars was \$46,058. In January of 2006, it was \$44,389, almost \$2,000 less. Median income Americans are losing ground while median home prices have increased from \$139,700 in 2001 to 215,900 in 2004.

Health insurance costs have gone up from a monthly average in 2001 of \$135 to \$222. College tuition for our children has increased, while government assistance has remained flat. I could go on and on about lower income and high prices, including costs of gas for our cars and utilities to heat and cool our homes. We need a concerted effort by Congress and the administration to reverse this trend that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Middle income Americans are getting poorer. We have real needs in this country, and it is all too clear that the President's State of the Union speech and the administration's budget have not addressed the concerns of America.

CONSUMER-DRIVEN HEALTH CARE

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

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, it seems that tonight is health care night. We just heard from two of our colleagues from Texas, one of whom I agree with and one of whom on a lot of points I do not necessarily agree with. But, Mr. Speaker, I do rise tonight to express my deep concern over the high cost of health care and the toll it has taken on our families and our businesses and our economy.

I was very encouraged to hear President Bush discuss the important issue of health care reform during a speech in Ohio today. A recent NBC news poll showed 76 percent of Americans believe health care reform is a top priority for our Nation and we absolutely must act to create a more transparent accessible and affordable system, as the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) just said.

Before coming to Congress, I practiced medicine as an OB-GYN for 26 years. I know that America has the best doctors, hospitals, research facili-

ties in the world, but all of that is for naught if people, Mr. Speaker, cannot afford the care that they need.

However, different Americans have different health care needs, and we cannot resort to a Hillary-care program, to a one-size-fits-all system of care. We rejected that in 1993, and we reject it here today in 2006. Instead, we need reform that allows Americans to be better health care consumers.

When we shop for a new car or home what do we do? We compare prices to get the best deal and the best product. Health care should be no different. Too many Americans are paying the high cost of health care out of their own pockets, and the family budget is suffering. This is exactly why we need real practical initiatives like health savings accounts and association health plans, despite what the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GENE GREEN) just said. We need this to make health care affordable, portable and secure.

The number of people that are buying high deductible health plans along with these health savings plans is not decreasing, as the gentleman suggested, but it is increasing. Three million today and by 2010 14 million. I am very supportive and proud that the President talked about this and is going to expand health savings plans for the future. These initiatives will help businesses across America afford health benefits for their employees, which in turn will reduce the number of uninsured in this country.

I am as concerned, Mr. Speaker, as all of my colleagues are of the fact that we have maybe 41 or 42 million people in this country without health care. But this is the way you get them the health care so they can get a policy with a very low premium that covers the catastrophic and they can stash away money each year in that health savings account. It can grow just like an IRA and they can use this money in many instances for medical care that is not covered under a traditional health care policy. I am talking about things like dental care, a hearing aid or visual care.

So along with flexibility in our health care system, this is another very important point, and Mr. BURGESS just spoke about that.

We must be technologically advanced. You heard, Mr. Speaker, Chairman DREIER talk a little bit about job statistics and how we do not need to be using twentieth century machinations to determine what our growth and our job rate is. We need to have a better system that more accurately reflects the job growth in this country. It is the same thing with the health care system. It must be technologically advanced.

Mr. Speaker, I recently went to Antarctica and, amazingly, I could get cash from an ATM machine with no glitch in Antarctica. But if I had fallen ill during my travels, the hospital

there could not have accessed my medical records or known what medications I am on; and I happen to be on several heart medications.

This is a recipe for disaster, and to fix this crucial shortcoming I have introduced legislation to increase tax breaks for physicians who invest in the new technology of electronic medical records. Physicians are more likely to adopt this new technology if our Tax Code helps offset the substantial, and they can be substantial, initial costs.

We have seen the success of this tactic with other tax relief for small businesses. H.R. 4641, the Adopt HIT Act, will help our doctors save money, time and, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, save lives.

Reforming health care will make coverage more affordable and accessible for both workers and employers, especially our small businessmen and women. But affordable health care is only half of the equation. After all, the most affordable health care in the world is, Mr. Speaker, irrelevant if a patient cannot get in to see a doctor when he is sick or visit the emergency room when he is injured.

As a practicing physician for nearly 30 years, I have seen the results of our troubled medical tort system firsthand. In many communities, hospitals have closed, women have to travel across State lines for prenatal care, emergency rooms lack the on-call specialists they need to save lives. This should not happen in America, home to the greatest physicians in the world.

I call on my colleagues to join me in the effort to create a consumer-driven system of care for our country.

HONORING MORGAN PARK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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

Mr. RUSH. Mr. Speaker, today I want to tell this Congress and this Nation about a high school success story. Today I would like to acknowledge students and teachers from the Morgan Park High School located in my district, the first congressional district on the south side of the City of Chicago.

Morgan Park High School students posted world-class advanced placements test scores. Mr. Speaker, it must be noted, particularly as this is the month that we celebrate black history, February, it must be noted that out of the more than 15,000 high schools and 31 countries worldwide, more students at Morgan Park High School passed their AP exams in two courses, English language composition and European history, than at any other high school in the Nation or in the world.

□ 1930

The vast majority of these students were African American. The number of African-American students passing these college-level exams at Morgan

Park High School is even more amazing considering the fact that African Americans are the most underrepresented racial group in the country in AP classrooms.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the excellent teaching and tutelage of their teachers, Ms. Judith Keyhoe, Ms. Marilyn Jackson and Mr. Martin Luzzo, all of the Morgan Park students deserve special recognition and congratulations from this Congress today.

Morgan Park High School is a great example of what dedicated administrators, committed teachers, motivated students, and involved parents can accomplish; and I ask all my colleagues to please join me in congratulating Morgan Park High School, this fine school, for their wonderful academic achievement.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to just take a moment to name the individual students that allowed Morgan Park High School to soar to these unprecedented heights. These students are: Jorge Anguiano, Jenele Anderson, Desney Avery, Nicole Banks, Brian Belcher, Aryelle Berry, Evan Beverly, Jasmine Bomer, Justin Booz, Christina Boyce, Jenise Chappell, Monique Childress, Angelo Dasilva, Eric Dorsey, Natalie Dowdell, Patrice Gardner, Jeffrey Gonzales, Brandon Hamilton, Zellonda Harris, Rachel Hoffman, Dominique Jones, Edward King, Latasha Kinnard, Juwaun McClain, Amanda Moore, Tichina Moore, Eduardo Morales, Jeffrey Nelson, Cecilia Ortiz, Kimberly Randle, Ashley Rouse, Lajoi Royston, Renata Sago, Bradley Thomas, Jerome Wade, Langston Wesley, Alexandria Willis, Rachel Woods, Joshua Young.

To the students at Morgan Park High School, we take our hats off to you. Keep up the good work. Make sure that you keep on the path to success. This Congress, this Nation, is very proud of you. God bless you.

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

(Ms. SOLIS 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 gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. HERSETH 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 Maryland (Mr. WYNN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. WYNN 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 gen-

tleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. STUPAK 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 Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana 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 Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. DELAURO addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE OFFICIAL TRUTH SQUAD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, what a great pleasure it is to come and speak to the House tonight about a number of different topics. I want to thank the leadership and the conference for giving me the opportunity to lead an hour here and talk about things that are of utmost importance to our citizens all across this Nation.

When I have talked with some of my constituents, many of my constituents at home, over and over and over again I hear them say, what is going on up there in Washington, why has the discussion, the personal animosity that seems to be brought to so many of our debates, why is that occurring? It is a great question because it does a disservice to us all; it really does.

What we are beginning tonight is what we are calling the Official Truth Squad. This is our new logo of the Official Truth Squad, and we thought that was appropriate because there are so many times that you hear on the floor inaccuracies here, and so we thought it was appropriate to put together a group of folks that would come as often as needed to bring some truth.

To start that truth, I just wanted to set kind of the premise of why people are so disgusted, what kinds of things that are being said that make people so doggone disgusted with some of the language that is going on up here in Washington.

These are real quotes; and I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, that people