

We don't need a troop surge in Iraq. We need a diplomatic surge, and we need to demand responsibility from the Iraqi people.

I yield to the gentleman from Colorado.

Mr. SALAZAR. I want to thank the gentleman for his comments. I think it is clear, with the figures that you have given us, that the \$378 billion is not really a true reflection of what the Iraqi war has cost us.

And you are absolutely right, we as Blue Dogs, we as Democrats will stand strong with our troops making sure that they have the equipment that they need, and that is one of the things I wanted to talk about tonight was the Iraq war supplemental that our leadership has proposed includes making sure that we take care of our veterans; it includes money for devastated farmers and ranchers across this country due to weather problems and other issues.

So I believe that this is the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do. But I would ask the administration to please look into trying some diplomatic efforts in the Middle East, and hopefully we can move this forward and bring our troops home as quickly and safely as possible. In the meantime, let us not forget the men and women in uniform who serve this country bravely. And I want to thank the gentleman for inviting me today to visit with the American public and tell them the truth about what is going on with America's budget.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Colorado for joining me this evening here on the floor to talk about restoring accountability to our government and demanding responsibility from the Iraqi people.

The American people spoke loud and clear on election day: they are ready for a new direction in Iraq. They don't want more of the same; they want a new direction. And that is what will be voted on on the floor of the House tomorrow. There will be a lot of mischaracterizations of what we are voting on.

Here is the bottom line: we are giving the President every penny he asked for for Iraq. Above and beyond that, we are going to provide funding for Walter Reed Army Hospital and for other VA hospital facilities to ensure that this new generation of veterans coming home, not only from Iraq, but also from Afghanistan, receive the very best in health care available to them, because we owe it to them. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our brave men and women in uniform who have done everything that has been asked of them.

What this bill also does, I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, that people understand this, the other thing this bill says is that we will have troops in Iraq for another year. And even after the year is up, we will continue to have troops there; but instead of having our men and women in uniform from America on the front lines getting shot at

and wounded and killed, we will be there in an advisory role to train Iraqis and demand, a year from now, demand that they step up, that they step up and provide the police and military force for their country.

I think it is very important that the American people understand we are going to send our brave men and women in uniform every dime the President has asked for them, but we are also going to demand accountability and responsibility by the Iraqi people and tell them a year from now it is their turn.

Mr. SALAZAR. I just wanted to thank the gentleman. We see him on the floor every Tuesday trying to get the message out to the American public and trying to make sure that the figures that are being stated here in Congress are the true figures. I think that the American people deserve to know the truth, and I commend the gentleman for his dedication not only to the Blue Dog Coalition but also to the American people. And it is super-important, I believe, that the American people know the truth. Thank you very much. I appreciate your inviting me to speak with you tonight.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Colorado, a fellow Blue Dog member, a member of the 43-member strong fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, for joining me here on the floor this evening.

Mr. Speaker, if you have any comments, questions, or concerns, I would invite you to e-mail us at BlueDog@mail.house.gov. Again, Mr. Speaker, if you have any comments, questions, or concerns, I would encourage you to e-mail us at BlueDog@mail.house.gov.

In the final 3 minutes that we have in the Special Order this evening, I want to point out that one of the things that has been endorsed by the Blue Dog Coalition that we are 100 percent united on is what is called House Resolution 97, Providing for Operation Iraqi Freedom Cost Accountability. The Blue Dogs have endorsed and introduced House Resolution 97. It was offered by JANE HARMAN, former ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee and Congressman PATRICK MURPHY who was a captain in our Army and served in Iraq. And it provides for Operation Iraqi Freedom cost accountability to address the lack of oversight and accountability with regard to the Federal Government's funding of the war in Iraq.

House Resolution 97, which currently has 61 cosponsors, puts forward tangible commonsense proposals that ensure future transparency and accountability in the funding of Operation Iraqi Freedom. If we are going to send \$12 million an hour of your tax money to Iraq, we expect accountability and responsibility for how that money is being spent. We want to know without a shadow of a doubt that it is being spent to protect and equip our brave men and women in uniform. It is an

important first step toward making sure that more resources get to our troops in the field.

There is a big debate right now of whether the body armor provided them in 2003, is that the best body armor in 2007. If we are going to send our troops over there, we must provide them with the very best, most advanced equipment that is available.

House Resolution 97 focuses on four crucial points for demanding fiscal responsibility in Iraq:

Number one, a call for transparency on how Iraq war funds are spent;

Number two, the creation of a Truman Commission to investigate the awarding of contracts;

Number three, a need to fund the Iraq war through the normal appropriations process, and not through the so-called emergency supplementals;

And, number four, using American resources to improve Iraqi assumption of internal policing operations, demand more from this new Iraqi Government.

In addition, House Resolution 97 calls for the Iraqi Government and its people to progress toward full responsibility for internally policing their country. Members of the Blue Dog Coalition also believe strongly that funding requests for the Iraq war should come through the normal appropriations process rather than through multiple emergency supplemental requests. Since 2003, the Republican-held Congress has been funding the war through emergency supplemental requests, \$166 billion in 2003, \$25 billion in 2004, \$76 billion in 2005, \$50 billion in 2006, and another \$70 billion after that and \$99 billion for 2007 and \$142 for 2008. And the list goes on and on.

If we are going to be there and if we know we are going to be there, let's put it in the budget and quit hiding it in the so-called emergency supplementals. The American people deserve to know that some \$12 million an hour of their tax money is going to Iraq. And what the Blue Dogs are asking for in House Resolution 97, we are demanding from this administration and from the Pentagon accountability to ensure that every dime that goes over there is spent protecting and equipping and serving our honorable men and women in uniform who do everything that this country asks of them.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I ask that you join me in keeping our brave men and women in uniform serving us tonight in Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of the world in our hearts and in our prayers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight during Cover the Uninsured Week to draw attention to a national crisis.

According to the Census Bureau, 46.6 million Americans are without health insurance. Millions more encounter a health care system that is inadequate in meeting their basic medical needs because they are underinsured.

According to a recent Commonwealth Fund study, there are 16 million Americans who are underinsured, meaning that their insurance did not adequately protect them against catastrophic health care expenses. That means, in total, 61 million Americans have either no health insurance or only sporadic coverage, or have insurance coverage that leaves them exposed to high health care costs. Sixty-one million Americans is nearly 21 percent of all Americans, one in five.

The lack of affordable, comprehensive health care affects every congressional district in this Nation. To highlight the issue and the real impact that being uninsured has on the lives of Americans, I have selected some letters that I have received from my constituents who have had difficulty in obtaining and affording comprehensive health care coverage. Too often here in Congress we speak of health care issues in antiseptic jargon of policymakers and lawyers. But people across America are hurting, and these letters tell their stories in their own words.

I represent a district in south central Wisconsin, and while the letters I read may be from the State of Wisconsin, they speak to the difficulties of people all over the United States, difficulties people face every day. I am going to start with a few letters about the ever-increasing price of health care.

Eva from Madison, Wisconsin writes: "I am contacting you in regards to my desperate need for public health care. I am a grad student. I recently sprained my ankle playing soccer and had to go to the emergency room for x-rays. My bill came out to \$1,242.50 because I can only afford measly insurance that only has catastrophic coverage. This is a ridiculous amount of money for such a visit, and it causes me to consider those less fortunate than me who have even more serious injuries and less familial support. This cost can truly make waves in the lives of people."

Suzanne from Stoughton, Wisconsin writes: "It is time, time to have the government deal with health care. We are covered under COBRA, which will run out in March. The cost is going from \$500 per month to \$900 per month. We checked with Blue Cross, and they refused us coverage because of a pre-existing condition. They will not even offer a waiver for this preexisting condition. We checked with the Wisconsin State Insurance Program, which will cover us for \$1,200 per month. Please, let people over 60 buy into Medicare. It is impossible to find a job that offers health insurance."

And then there is the story of Sylvia from Fitchburg, Wisconsin. Sylvia was

uninsured when she was hospitalized with a need for an appendectomy. Even after the hospital charity program reduced her bill, she still owed over \$11,000 to the hospital. Sometimes the bill collectors call her at home five times a day. Sylvia chips away at this bill sending in the most she can, \$20 to \$50 a month.

Roberta from Janesville, Wisconsin writes: "I think insurance bills for both medical and dental care are horrendous. Both my husband and I work full time, with two small children, living pay check to pay check. My insurance costs have caused us many heartaches, with us owing more money than what needs to be paid. As a result, I will not get a needed medical procedure done. Something drastically needs to change in the United States of America where hardworking individuals and families can get the treatment they need without going broke."

Roberta brings up an important point in her letter, because people without health insurance are often not getting the care that they desperately need. A recent study released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that cost prevented 41.1 percent of uninsured adults from seeking a doctor when they needed to seek care.

But getting needed care is also difficult for Americans who have health insurance because of the financial strain relating to high premiums, high health care costs, increasing copays, deductibles. These place an incredible strain on American families, often forcing them to choose between needed health care and basic necessities like food.

□ 2230

It is no wonder that illness, injury and medical debt is responsible for nearly 50 percent of all personal bankruptcies in the United States. Only about 40 percent of businesses who employ low-wage or part-time workers offer health benefits. And at \$11,480 a year, the average family's health insurance premiums now cost more than a minimum wage worker makes in a year. And as we all know, the costs of health care are rising faster than inflation. Between 2000 and 2006, health premiums for employer-sponsored insurance jumped 87 percent, far outpacing inflation's 18 percent overall increase over the same period of time.

Patricia, from Madison, Wisconsin writes: We need to fix health care. I have to choose between heat and food and medications. I have lost 80 pounds because of this. Please help.

Heather, from Waterloo, Wisconsin writes: I am married and together with my husband I own a home. We live a modest, middle-class life, managing to always have what we need except for health care coverage. My husband has excellent health care at his job, but for me to also be covered by his plan, we would need to pay nearly \$400 per month. That is two-thirds as much as our home mortgage. Through school, I

have worked less and less in order to maintain health coverage, and I have only been able to afford short-term, major medical coverage. I am grateful that we can afford this, and it does make a difference. However, even now, I have a sore throat and I will wait for a few days to see how I feel. And I will wait because if I don't need to go, I will certainly save the money. This is disturbing to me, as a nursing student, because I know about the importance of early treatment and prevention. And it is upsetting to me as a person because I value my health. It is unacceptable to me as a citizen, because I know there are other people just like me who wait and get sicker or can't take the medications they need.

Mr. Speaker, simply put, our health care system is failing, and America knows this. Among the thousands of letters regarding health care that I receive, there is a common thread, a common theme that brings them together, and that common theme is an overwhelming frustration with the system, a system they know is just not working, and a call for us in Congress to take action, bold action.

Brad, from Mount Horeb, Wisconsin writes: I write to you today to urge you to take action on a growing crisis in America: health care. I strongly believe that we need a national health care plan to insure all Americans. My major concern with the current system is that when people attempt to obtain insurance, insurance companies refuse them because of past health history. Let's face it. Insurance companies are in business to make a profit. The best way to make a profit is to insure the healthy so you can minimize the claims you pay out, and not insure those who need medical care or may potentially need medical care.

Brad goes on to write: I am 38 years old, with a family of four. I currently participate in a health savings account. For all practical purposes, I pay all of my own medical needs, including the recent birth of our daughter. I recently attempted to switch insurance providers. The insurance companies will insure me, but they will not insure my daughter for any type of treatment for her asthma for 3 years, along with no drug coverage for life. The policy I was requesting had a \$10,000 deductible, yet they still refused the coverage.

Lisa, from Madison, Wisconsin writes: I am a very healthy person, and my husband and children are very healthy. We cannot get insurance. I think everyone should attempt to gain an individual health policy just to see how impossible it is. I am not a risk. Really, I am not. I am terrified right now because we are uninsured.

Carol, from Madison, Wisconsin writes: As someone who has had no health insurance at all for 3 years, I can tell you that it was pretty miserable being one of the millions of people in this country without health insurance. Not long ago, my best friend died

at age 42 because of ovarian cancer because she did not have health insurance and waited too long to see what was causing all of her symptoms. Yes, people in America actually die from not having health insurance.

Darla from Fitchburg, writes me. She says, "I lost my job because of unpredictable attendance due to my health issues. Upon losing my job I signed up for COBRA. Last week I received a letter indicating that my COBRA eligibility ends soon. In order for me to get health coverage, I would have to work at least 20 hours per week, but my physicians believe that it would do me more harm than good relating to my health issues. If I don't get some sort of health insurance, I will need to stop all treatments, as I have no money to pay for doctors' services. My prescription drugs will have to stop, as I will not be able to pay for them either. What can I do?" Darla asks.

Kimberly, from Madison, Wisconsin writes to me, "I am writing today because of my family's frustration and anxiety over health care. Although we hear a lot of rhetoric about making health care more affordable and/or more available for Americans, nothing is happening, at least not soon enough.

"Let me briefly share our story," Kimberly proceeds. "My husband recently started his own business. Obviously, it will take some time for his new company to see any profits, much less income. In the meantime, we are without health insurance. I am 5 months pregnant, and we have a 2-year-old son. Because of my preexisting condition, we cannot buy affordable health coverage. COBRA would cost us \$1,200 per month. I am currently applying for Medicaid and other forms of public assistance as a last resort. This is ridiculous.

"As someone with no insurance, I wonder what could possibly be the problem with implementing a public health care system. Oh, I have heard the horrible stories about having fewer choices in doctors or longer waiting lists for procedures and less incentive among doctors and researchers to develop new technologies. But what is most frightening to me is the chance that my son might get sick, or my baby might be born with expensive complications while we are uninsured.

"I am not naive. I know that funding public health care is an issue. But is it wise to sacrifice the health and well-being of American citizens to avoid the challenge of implementing a change? I, for one, would be satisfied to pay more for goods and services if I could rest assured that my family's basic health care needs were being met."

David, from Cross Plains, Wisconsin writes, "My wife and I have been self-employed for over 18 years, and have paid thousands of dollars for health insurance premiums. As of a few months ago, we had to drop out and are now without health insurance. The cost is completely out of reach. In fact, it is nuts. Now that I am 50 years old, it is

not a matter of if I will have health problems, it is a matter of when. Tammy, we will lose everything we have ever worked for. So much for the American dream. Now we look forward to dying broke and possibly homeless."

Victor, from Stoughton, Wisconsin, writes, "My wife can only work part time because of her health. Her employer offers a generic policy that costs only \$3.97 per week and requires no background check. This policy covers basically nothing. Medical supplies, check-ups, doctors' visits necessary on a routine basis for my wife to survive are now not covered. My wife is uninsurable because of her health, and we have been turned down for health insurance that we have applied for. We cannot believe that this is happening."

Ronald, from Deerfield, Wisconsin writes, "I was on COBRA insurance for 3 years, which ended this past fall. I spent from March until September trying to get private insurance, but could not because of my neck injury. I was, in effect, looked at and dismissed by 33 private insurance companies because of my preexisting condition with my neck injury. Imagine how you would feel, after being dismissed by this many companies. I was finally insured through disability and Medicare. The sad reality of it is that if I want to try to work full-time again, I cannot, because in doing so it would cost me the only insurance options that I have left.

"The truth is that many other countries can and do provide equitable health insurance to all of their citizens, no matter what preexisting conditions they have, or their ability to pay, or what income level they have. I believe this country does have top-notch medical facilities, but not decent or equitable insurance for the poor and middle-income families.

Susan, from Baraboo, Wisconsin writes me, "I am writing you today regarding health insurance coverage for single people with no children. As of this time, I feel that I am left out of the loop in regards to this topic. I am 42, and last September I was diagnosed with breast cancer. In January of this year, the company that I worked for informed us that they would be closing down. I was laid off in December while I was out due to my cancer treatment. I have been searching for health care coverage everywhere because my COBRA will be going up, and I am on unemployment and barely able to pay the \$244.76 for the coverage now. I cannot get insurance because of the breast cancer.

"The High Risk State Insurance Program, which is the Wisconsin program, is too expensive for me to get coverage, since they want 4 months of premiums up front, and as they only cover some things. What are single people supposed to do," Susan asks? "We don't qualify for any government assistance because we are single. We cannot go without insurance. There are no programs to help us out. So when you are working on health care in the House of Representa-

tives, please remember that there are other single people out there also in my shoes. I am at a crossroads because I have no avenue for assistance when it comes to health care. Come November, I will be unable to get coverage when I need it at this point in my life:

Janet from Portage, Wisconsin writes, "I have a 53-year-old brother who has psoriasis all over his body and arthritis that is caused by this. Three weeks ago he fell and needs surgery on his shoulder to repair it. He has no job, no money, and no insurance. We started looking for a program to help him. There are none that we can find. There is nothing to get him help to get his shoulder fixed. But after it heals wrong and he is disabled because of it, then there are programs to help him. They won't help him get it fixed so he can find a good job. Instead, they would rather support him for the rest of his life instead of trying to help him now:

Gail, from Janesville, Wisconsin writes, "My husband recently lost his job. He applied for over 100 positions, only to be told that he lacked a college degree, or he is overqualified, or that they can only pay \$8 an hour. I was diagnosed with breast cancer in June of 1998, and again in 2003. I have gone through breast cancer twice, and have undergone a mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. COBRA has run out, and without a stable income, we cannot afford to pay the premiums for our own health care policy. My husband is 59 and I am 58, and we have no medical coverage. I have looked into every insurance company and get turned down because of my medical history. All our lives we have paid into these insurance companies, only to be turned away when we need the coverage the most."

□ 2245

Lastly, I want to relay a story that was shared with me by Laurie. Laurie is a fourth grade teacher in the Madison, Wisconsin, public school system. Laurie recently had a student fall during recess and break his foot. Laurie wrote: "As he was waiting, in extreme pain and cold, for the school nurse to get to him, he cried to an assistant waiting with him, 'I can't go to the doctor. We don't have insurance.'"

That a 9- or 10-year-old boy should think even something like this is an atrocity.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that as Cover the Uninsured Week continues, my colleagues will join me in recognizing that obtaining comprehensive, affordable health care presents a very real challenge for millions upon millions of Americans. We cannot turn a deaf ear to our constituents' pleas for help. I invite my colleagues to join me in working on this most pressing domestic priority to provide affordable health care for all Americans.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to: