

fourth annual National Health Information Technology Week. Health information technology is a critical piece of health care reform.

The cost of our health care system is the main burden. As we look for ways to expand coverage to the millions of Americans who don't have it, getting costs under control is absolutely critical.

Health care information technology is one way to do that. If we can improve the quality of our IT systems and our health care system, we can improve the quality of health care for millions of Americans by getting better information to both doctors and patients more quickly.

Right now the system is woefully behind most other businesses in developing and improving IT. This House took an important step in the stimulus package passed last January by putting \$19 billion towards improving health care information technology.

It's critical that that money is well spent. It is critical that we improve our health IT systems if we are going to improve the quality of our health care system for all Americans.

NEW YORK TIMES GIVES MILES OF COVERAGE TO OBAMA

(Mr. SMITH of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, President Obama and his agenda are in the news so much that media research groups are finding new ways to measure the coverage.

According to the Center For Media and Public Affairs, The New York Times has featured 405 stories about the Obama administration on its front page in the last 8 months. These stories total 120,000 column entries. That equals almost 2 miles of coverage devoted to President Obama and his agenda.

Not surprisingly, the New York Times featured more positive coverage of the President than any other news outlet, according to the Center For Media and Public Affairs. The national media should devote more time and a few more inches to covering the other side of the story.

AUTOMOBILE DEALERS WHO WERE FORCED TO CLOSE THEIR DOORS

(Mr. BUTTERFIELD asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice concern over the thousands of automobile dealers who have been forced to close their doors as the industry is now reshaping. While the national conversation has shifted from the auto industry to health care, we must remember that car dealerships continue to be shuttered and thousands of hardworking Americans continue to lose their jobs.

In my State of North Carolina, 49 Chrysler and General Motors dealerships have closed, along with all of the Pontiac dealers. Thirty Cadillac dealers are slated to close and, unfortunately, the closures are continuing.

One of the dealerships is J.C. Harris Pontiac and Cadillac. This dealership is in my hometown of Wilson, North Carolina. They have been serving the community for more than 40 years. Despite the fact that they lead Cadillac dealerships statewide in sales, service and customer satisfaction, J.C. Harris is being forced to close its doors. Customers from the region will be forced to drive 120 miles round trip for sales and service.

With American taxpayers becoming investors in GM, they should expect better.

□ 1030

OFFSHORE DRILLING

(Mr. HASTINGS of Washington asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, last week, Interior Secretary Salazar stated that the Obama administration would "move expeditiously" on finalizing a new offshore drilling plan. While I hope this to be true, unfortunately, this administration has proposed one delay after another to block new energy production and new jobs.

In February, the administration stalled new offshore drilling with an extended 6-month comment period. Now we've learned they may wait until 2012 before implementing a new offshore drilling plan. This means the offshore drilling ban that was lifted last year by the President and by the Congress would effectively remain in place for 3 more years. With 10 percent unemployment, Mr. Speaker, Americans can't wait 3 more years to begin producing more energy and millions more jobs.

It's time to lift the de facto ban on new offshore drilling. It's time to act on the Republicans' all-of-the-above energy plan that will create green jobs, drilling jobs, wind and solar jobs, and nuclear jobs.

Let's get America to work producing more energy.

THE PROGRESS OF THE ECONOMY

(Mr. SIREs asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SIREs. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to highlight the progress that our economy has made. When President Obama took office, he faced the greatest economic crisis in a generation: home foreclosures were at a record level, banks were in crisis, and we had just lost 700,000 jobs in January 2009 alone.

Congress took action, and it is starting to work. In just 200 days since the

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was signed into law, 30,000 projects have been approved, including community health center upgrades and transportation improvements; the rate of job loss has declined; the jobs of thousands of police officers, nurses, and teachers have been saved; and 95 percent of working Americans received a tax cut in their paychecks.

Moreover, employers are hiring again, consumer confidence is rising, consumer spending is increasing, and the housing market is turning around.

While we're beginning to see the end of the recession, there's still more work to be done. We must continue to build on the progress we have made in the Recovery Act to further jump-start our economy and build a new foundation for a lasting recovery.

NAS ATLANTA

(Mr. GINGREY of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GINGREY of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Naval Air Station Atlanta. Since April of 1959, NAS Atlanta, located close to my home in Marietta, Georgia, has played a critical role in providing for our Nation's defense.

Over the past 50 years, NAS Atlanta has seen its mission change from training, to fleet logistics, to housing Navy Attack Squadrons and Carrier Early Airborne Warning Squadrons. In the 1990s, the Marines joined NAS Atlanta with MAG-42 and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 142.

Units from NAS Atlanta have been instrumental to our causes in the war on drugs and global war on terror, as well as to the relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina. NAS Atlanta and those who have served there have proven an invaluable asset to the United States.

This Saturday, NAS Atlanta's distinguished history will come to a close as the base will officially become the home of the Georgia National Guard, as mandated by the BRAC round.

To all the personnel who are and have been stationed at NAS Atlanta: thank you for a job well done and for your service to our community. You will be missed.

THE STUDENT LOAN BILL AND THE ECONOMY

(Mr. ARCURI asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ARCURI. Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that I take time to promote a bill that I think has been lost in the constant and necessary debate regarding health care reform over the past several months.

While reforming our Nation's health care system is absolutely critical, last week in Congress we passed a bipartisan piece of legislation that will

greatly benefit prospective college students of all ages from across the country.

The Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act will transform the way student loan programs operate by boosting Federal loan rates across the board, including a \$40 billion increase in Pell Grant scholarship programs. It will keep interest rates low and make loan application forms simpler to understand and complete, doing away with the cumbersome paperwork that now makes applying for aid a daunting task.

I have 14 colleges and universities in my district. In many cases, these institutions are the main economic engine for the towns and cities in which they are located. This piece of legislation will benefit all of them as more students can go to college and come to these great towns that provide an economic boost for the surrounding regions.

This legislation will also have a positive impact on our economy's sustainability, as it will save taxpayers \$87 billion over 10 years by switching to the cheaper Direct Loan Program.

I think this piece of legislation is a win-win.

OCCUPIED TERRITORY

(Mr. GOHMERT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. GOHMERT. President Obama has indicated before that, basically, Israel needs to not be occupying land that was acquired during war. Yesterday, to the U.N. he said that a big part of the goal is this: a viable, independent Palestinian state with contiguous territory that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and realizes the potential of the Palestinian people. Well, he has also indicated this Nation, the United States, will not be hypocritical any longer around the world.

Terrible news this is for California—all of California, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, most of New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming, because it means you're about to be given back to Mexico, territory that we acquired in 1848 as a result of a war.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO SUSPEND THE RULES

Ms. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 766 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 766

Resolved, That it shall be in order at any time through the legislative day of September 24, 2009, for the Speaker to entertain motions that the house suspend the rules relating to the bill (H.R. 3631) to amend title XVIII to provide for the application of a consistent Medicare part B premium for all Medicare beneficiaries in a budget neutral manner for 2010.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman from California is recognized for 1 hour.

Ms. MATSUI. For the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART). All time yielded during the consideration of the rule is for debate only.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. MATSUI. I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous materials into the RECORD.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Ms. MATSUI. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this rule provides for consideration of H.R. 3631, the Medicare Premium Fairness Act, under suspension of the rules. It allows this body to consider time-sensitive legislation under an expedited process to shield millions of Medicare beneficiaries from harmful premium increases for the coming year.

Due to the struggles facing our economy today, many seniors will not receive Social Security COLAs this year, even though the Medicare part B premiums will still rise. The Medicare Premium Fairness Act addresses this problem by protecting Medicare beneficiaries from bearing the burden of increased premiums because of an economic downturn largely outside of their control. And it does so without adding to the deficit.

Without today's bill, seniors who are new to the Medicare program will see their monthly premiums jump dramatically. Other part B recipients will shoulder an unfairly large share of cost increases because of the way current law requires part B to be funded. Cash-strapped States will be forced to bear the burden of higher Medicare costs for dual-eligible beneficiaries.

For these reasons, I believe my colleagues will agree with me that inaction is not an option here today. As our country begins to climb back out of one of the largest recessions in recent memory, now is the worst possible moment to saddle our seniors with increased premiums.

Many respected outside groups agree with this statement and have endorsed the Medicare Premium Fairness Act. AARP, the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, the Center for Medicare Advocacy, and the Alliance for Retired Americans have all endorsed H.R. 3631.

These groups understand that we're living through a time when rising costs have threatened the health care people in this country have and deserve. This is true for Medicare beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries alike.

For this reason, making health care more affordable for all Americans is our top priority. And protecting and strengthening Medicare is an essential

part of this vision. I urge my colleagues to support today's rule and the underlying bill so that beneficiaries can continue to see their doctors; so that they can continue to afford their prescriptions, especially medications; so that they can continue to have money to spend and cycle back through our recovering economy.

By acting quickly and decisively on today's bill, we underscore our commitment to preserve Medicare for millions of people who have earned the security it represents and who count on the stability and the dignity it provides. In doing so, we will keep our collective promise to stand with America's seniors as they age and to ensure they have the health care they need to live long and fruitful lives.

We must never forget that Medicare is an essential part of our country's social contract. It guarantees that America's seniors will not be forced to fend for themselves when the economy momentarily turns sour or when they get sick or as they age. This is the living legacy of the Medicare program, and it is a legacy we build upon today.

But we do not have much time to act, Mr. Speaker. We must pass this legislation before October 1. This is so that the Social Security Administration can program updated premiums into a system in time to ensure that Medicare premium increases do not hit seniors in their pocketbooks and in their doctors' offices. Speed and bipartisan cooperation are of essence if we are to avoid this problem.

The suspension authority this rule provides will allow the House to move quickly and decisively to move this fix over to the Senate. The sooner we have this bill on the President's desk, the better off millions of Medicare beneficiaries will be. I urge my colleagues to recognize that passing this bill quickly is in the best interest of our constituents, of the Medicare program, and of our country.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. I'd like to thank my friend, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MATSUI) for the time, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

House Resolution 766 provides that it will be in order at any time on the legislative day of today to consider H.R. 3631, the Medicare Premium Fairness Act. That underlying legislation would freeze the Medicare part B premium for 2010 at the 2009 rate for beneficiaries who, under current law, will see a premium increase, along with an expected freeze in the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment, COLA, for 2010 and 2011. Both of those combined would leave seniors with less income next year if Congress does not act. So I support underlying legislation.

Although I support the underlying legislation that is being brought to the floor under this rule, I have reservations with the process the majority is proposing today. And I'm not the only one who has reservations with that process.