

I also realized that western Pennsylvania would be disproportionately impacted by competitive bidding because of our large Medicare population and the growing medical device industry that is key to the success of our region's economy.

After a poor start to the competitive bidding program in 2008, Congress intervened and passed legislation that I helped introduce to direct CMS to delay the program for 18 months. Critical flaws in the initial bidding process produced fewer competitors, fewer home care services, and a substantial decrease in the quality of care offered to seniors and individuals with disabilities. Congress also instructed CMS to redesign the program to avoid these programs when it conducted the re-bid.

Last fall, CMS launched the re-bid and this past January the program went into effect in the nine regions in the country, including western Pennsylvania. In the first few months of implementation, the worst fears expressed by patients, providers, and Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have been realized. It is clear that despite the delay and the direction from Congress, no significant improvements have been made to the program or the bidding process. Providers who have served beneficiaries for years are closing their doors, and patients have been left confused and unsure where to turn for their care.

While CMS hopes the program will ensure beneficiary access to quality medical supplies and services and improve the effectiveness of payments, the results suggest otherwise. So 2 weeks ago, CMS announced it would delay the second round of its competitive bidding program for 6 months, until the summer of 2013. Additionally, the chief Medicare expert at the Congressional Budget Office recently said the CMS competitive bidding process is "seriously flawed."

This is a good sign, but the round two delay does nothing to help the beneficiaries and small businesses that have already been negatively impacted by round one. The program continues to be a bad deal for seniors and small business owners. That's why I joined with my colleague from Pennsylvania, GLENN THOMPSON, to introduce legislation to repeal the DME competitive bidding program. Our bill would fully repeal the program in a budget-neutral manner, not adding one penny to the Federal deficit. To date, we have 75 bipartisan cosponsors and over 30 advocacy groups that have endorsed our legislation.

I cannot support the DME competitive bidding program when it has become evident the program will unravel the DME small business community and compromise quality of care for seniors and others who rely on durable medical equipment devices. I will continue to work with Congressman THOMPSON to advance this legislation, and I would ask my colleagues to join us in this effort to repeal DME competitive bidding.

□ 1010

#### SUPPORTING FINANCIAL LITERACY MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BIGGERT) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BIGGERT. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize this April as Financial Literacy Month.

Each year my good friend and fellow chair of the House Financial and Economic Literacy Caucus, Mr. HINOJOSA, and I work to bring Financial Literacy Month to Capitol Hill. In that effort we are joined by our longtime Senate allies, Senator AKAKA and Senator ENZI.

Traditionally, we have offered a resolution as a way to showcase the latest trends in financial and economic literacy. This year, however, the House is taking an understandable break from debating commemorative resolutions in order to focus attention on pressing items like the budget.

Nonetheless, I want to take a brief opportunity today to encourage my colleagues to take part in this year's Financial Literacy Month. It's a time when nonprofits, educational institutions, financial organizations, government agencies, and others work together to protect consumers and prepare our children to prosper in today's sophisticated marketplace.

For example, from April 17 through 23, America's credit unions will hold National Credit Union Youth Week, which focuses on teaching young Americans about the benefits of setting goals and saving to reach them. In a parallel effort, the American Bankers Association Education Foundation held Teach Children to Save Day on April 12. It's an annual event during which America's banking professionals have volunteered to teach money skills to 4 million young people.

Madam Speaker, this is a trend we should applaud, one that I encourage my colleagues to participate in by joining the Financial and Economic Literacy Caucus. Members and their staffs can also join us this Friday in the Cannon Caucus Room from noon to 3 for a Financial Literacy Day Fair featuring information and constituent outreach materials from 55 of the Nation's leading financial literacy organizations, including the Jump\$tart Coalition, Junior Achievement, and the Council for Economic Education.

Madam Speaker, too many Americans continue to enter the workforce unprepared to handle money, buy a home, or save for retirement. According to the Jump\$tart Coalition's most recent survey, our high school seniors are now scoring lower on financial literacy than they have during any years since 2000; and yet, according to a 2009 survey from the Council for Economic Education, only 34 States require school districts to include personal finance in their education standards for students K-12.

These are troubling numbers, and that's why we must work together to

give Americans the tools they need to prepare against economic uncertainty, recognize deceptive practices, build credit, and make dozens of other day-to-day financial decisions. These are skills that everyone must learn to prosper in today's complex marketplace, and that's what Financial Literacy Month is all about.

So I encourage my colleagues who are interested in learning more to join us this Friday from noon to 3 in the Cannon Caucus Room for our annual Financial Literacy Day Fair.

#### PUERTO RICO GAS PIPELINE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIERREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIERREZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk once again about Puerto Rico, but this time it's a little different.

I rise to note that Governor Luis Fortuño of Puerto Rico has actually said something I can agree with. Speaking about a proposed gas pipeline, the Republican Governor of Puerto Rico said, "We cannot continue to depend on fossil fuels. Gasoducto is fossil fuels."

He went on to say, "Tying us down to natural gas for 30 years would be a grave mistake."

He was referring to the construction of a natural gas pipeline on an island where beautiful beaches, mountains, and rain forests are both irreplaceable natural resources and part of the economic engine that drives tourism. A gas pipeline, that sounds like a dubious proposition. And I agree.

Mr. Fortuño spoke those words 2 years ago as a candidate. Sadly, now that he's safely in office, Governor Fortuño has changed his mind. Now he enthusiastically supports not just gas pipelines but a much bigger, environmentally disruptive, and more expensive pipeline.

And how the construction of this gigantic, supersized pipeline is being handled is another reason why I must speak out again on the civil rights crisis in Puerto Rico. The ruling party would rather people not notice that Mr. Fortuño and Governor Fortuño have opposite positions on the same gas pipeline, so they are working hard to move this project forward under the cover of night.

Every day the ruling party answers this question: If you wanted to undertake a potentially dangerous, economically dubious, environmentally disastrous, and extremely unpopular project, how would you go about doing it?

Here's the ruling party's answer: You circumvent feasibility studies. You avoid environmental impact studies. You ignore the standard permitting and licensing procedures. And you take every step possible to eliminate public hearings and public scrutiny.

But how do you proceed without these necessary safeguards and information? Well, if you're the government

of Puerto Rico and you want to build a 92-mile natural gas pipeline over mountains and through forests and lakes and rivers and across critical groundwater systems in Puerto Rico, you would amend a law designed to deal with natural resources so that you can bypass the normal permitting and public process.

What the ruling party does is declare an “energy emergency” on the island. This government’s energy emergency allows the pipeline to proceed, despite warnings from the Sierra Club, the environmental group Casa Pueblo, and even the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; despite residents’ concerns that it would be constructed near schools and churches and residential areas; despite geologists noting that it is near earthquake faults and that there have been 2,500 seismic events in the last 3 years on the island, and one just felt all over the island just 2 days ago.

The self-described “energy emergency” also helps hide the fact that you’ve given a \$10 million contract to a pal of the Governor who has no experience at constructing gas pipelines. He does, however, have experience skiing with the Governor. And maybe that’s why you run a slick, taxpayer-funded PR campaign that renames the project “The Via Verde”—“The Green Way.”

So instead of speaking to huge financial, human, and environmental costs, this Orwellian ad campaign calls a gas pipeline over mountains and through the woods and rivers a “green way.” Like a lot of people, I think it would be better to be named just “Green Away,” a magical cleanser that you apply to your forests, rivers, and lakes, and it makes them go away, along with the millions of green tax dollars.

Here’s an even more honest name for this project: “The Wrong Way.” Because it’s wrong to spend the people’s money on a project they don’t want and hasn’t been appropriately studied, as the newspaper *El Nuevo Dia* has shown in a series of reports.

Candidate Fortuño was right; Governor Fortuño is wrong. It’s time to shine some light on this matter.

I have sent Freedom of Information Act requests to every and all Federal agencies that have addressed the pipeline in Puerto Rico. I will release the results so that the people know whom their government is meeting with, what documents exist, and what studies have been done to show the need for this project. Furthermore, I have already urged the Army Corps of Engineers to deny the permit request for the pipeline until experts testify, permits are applied for, community meetings are held, and environmental impact studies are done.

Maybe the government can make the case for this project in the light of day, but they shouldn’t be asking for a verdict without presenting their facts to the people first. It’s time they stop doing things the “Via Verde” way and start doing things the right way.

The 1st of May all to Adjuntas.

#### RAMON CORTINES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. CHU) for 2 minutes.

Ms. CHU. Today I want to honor a man, Ramon Cortines, for his many years serving students in our public school system.

Ramon recently announced he was retiring as superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District. During his distinguished 55-year career in education, he has served as superintendent of schools in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, Pasadena, and New York City.

I had the great privilege to work with Ramon last year when the Los Angeles Unified School District passed a resolution calling for immediate passage of the DREAM Act.

But Ramon was not only a superintendent and advocate, he was a teacher in Aptos and Covina, which is in my district, and senior adviser to the U.S. Secretary of Education under President Clinton.

A lifelong educator, Ramon has taught at every level in the public school system—elementary, middle, and senior high school—and has shaped education policy as a consultant to every entity from Stanford University to the University of California.

Ramon came to the Los Angeles Unified School District at a time of great challenge; yet he was able to improve school safety, increase attendance, and reduce the dropout rate. Ramon Cortines has had an extraordinary record of service, and he changed the lives of thousands of children.

Although he will be greatly missed, we must all continue the mission he strived for during his 55-year career, and that is to ensure that every child receives a quality education.

□ 1020

#### 2012 BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DEUTCH) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEUTCH. Tomorrow, my Republican colleagues will bring a 2012 budget to the floor of the House, a budget that rolls back generations of progress and, quite simply, ends Medicare as we know it.

Fifty years ago, before Medicare and Medicaid were signed into law, Americans preparing to retire faced tremendous uncertainty. Private health insurance was simply out of reach. Savings put away during years of employment could barely cover those bills, if they could cover them at all. Seniors were forced to rely on their own children, many of whom were struggling to raise families of their own, to pay for medical care.

When the financial support of family and relatives was not an option, elderly Americans found themselves with the choice of a life without the care of doctors or a life of destitution. This was

the status quo before Medicare and Medicaid were signed into law, and the American people found it unacceptable.

We believed then, as we believe now, that we have a responsibility to ensure that seniors, children, and the permanently disabled, the most vulnerable in our society, have access to quality health care. It was this sense of shared responsibility that Congress codified in 1965 through the creation of Medicare and Medicaid.

As President Lyndon B. Johnson said as he signed this historic legislation, “No longer will older Americans be denied the healing miracle of modern medicine. No longer will illness crush and destroy the savings that they have so carefully put away over a lifetime so that they might enjoy dignity in their later years.”

Today, 45 million seniors depend on Medicare’s guaranteed quality benefits. Now this year, as in every year, we find ourselves in the middle of a budget debate. At times, both Republicans and Democrats can be accused of hyperbole. However, it is no exaggeration to say that the Republican budget headed to the House floor tomorrow abandons America’s seniors and does away with the concept of guaranteed Medicare benefits. It is no overstatement to say that it hands Medicare over to the private health insurance industry, and it is no lie to say that this plan ends Medicare as we know it.

This budget is no Path to Prosperity; for seniors, it is a path to the poor house. You can call it premium support; you can call it a voucher; you can call it a coupon; you can call it the golden ticket if you’d like; but changing the name won’t change the fact that this Republican plan will force America’s seniors to hand over most of their income to America’s insurers. Maybe instead of “premium support,” this plan should be called “insurance company profit assistance.”

By the time the Republican plan begins distributing coupons to seniors in 2022, most retirees will be unable to afford health care. After all, these coupons will be worth only 32 percent of the insurance bill. According to the nonpartisan analysts at the Congressional Budget Office, in less than two decades a private health insurance plan as good as Medicare will cost about \$30,000. Unfortunately, the Republican voucher that will be sent out under this budget plan will only be worth \$9,700. This means that there will be an insurance bill worth about \$21,000 sitting in the mailboxes of America’s seniors.

The Republican budget plan is no work of genius; it just shifts the burden of rising health care costs from the Federal Government to seniors and calls it a day. Through Medicare, Americans made a moral commitment as a people to ensure that seniors are not bankrupted by a hip replacement or diabetes medication. Likewise, with Medicaid, we made a moral commitment to ensure that elderly nursing