

loan interest rate system, letting student loan rates spike, forcing students to pay higher interest rates.

I continue to believe that students deserve the certainty of a fixed student loan interest rate. An ever-changing rate, as the Republican plan would provide, would create more anxiety and uncertainty for millions of families, and that's just the wrong approach. Hardworking students and parents have already been saddled with \$1 trillion of student loan debt. Congress should be working to ease that burden.

It's time that Congress return to regular order and prevent student loan interest rates from doubling at the end of the month. That means doing what we were sent here to do: going to conference to work out the differences between the House-passed version and the expected Senate version of this bill. The clock is ticking, and rates for millions of students will double on July 1 if we don't act.

Congress shouldn't let rigid partisanship get in the way of preventing what equates to a massive tax hike on students and their families. Instead, let's do our job and legislate. Disagreement on parts of a bill is not an excuse for delay.

Second, we should enact legislation to allow families to save more for college. Recently, I introduced a bill with my Republican colleague, Congressman TIM WALBERG, giving greater flexibility to families to save money for tuition, books, and other educational expenses. This bill, the Helping Families Save for Education Act, would increase existing caps on Coverdell savings accounts and allow families to contribute more over longer periods of time.

□ 1030

These types of accounts offer families a tax-advantaged choice to save for a child's educational expenses.

Currently, families or beneficiaries can contribute a maximum of \$2,000 a year. Our legislation would increase the maximum contribution annually for most working families. Families and students, under our legislation, would also be able to save for college for an additional 4 years, until the student turns 22 years old.

Third, we must continue to provide and fully support Pell Grants, which provide needs-based grants to low-income students. No one who wants to go to college should be priced out of doing so. So I, along with my Democratic colleagues, stand ready and eager to ensure a college degree remains in reach for every student, no matter what their means.

Finally, we must keep the cost of attending college low by continuing direct State and Federal support to universities. In my home State of Michigan, we are blessed with great public institutions that provide a world-class education to our citizens.

Unfortunately though, in recent years we've seen direct financial support to these universities slashed. Such

cuts are then passed on to students and families. If investing in education remains a priority for this Nation, we must invest in college for our students.

I ask a simple question: What's more important than the education of our children?

COMPETITIVE BIDDING FOR CMS SERVICES

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to address a situation that is evolving within this Nation where older adults on Medicare who have the misfortune of experiencing disease or disability and require durable medical equipment, equipment that is designed to allow people to live with dignity and independence in their own homes, we're seeing, through the actions of CMS, through Medicare, of preventing their access.

Medicare is awarding contracts to companies who are not even licensed in States to do business. In the end, it's going to cause a terrible disconnect with people being able to access the equipment that they need.

And not just the equipment. I spent 30 years working rehabilitation services as a therapist, rehab manager, and as a licensed nursing home administrator. I saw what difference this equipment makes, but also what the service makes, the technical assistance means for people who are living at home on oxygen or using wheelchairs or other types of medical equipment.

In the evenings, I actually was a volunteer EMT and firefighter; and frequently I'd find myself in the middle of the night, pager would go off and I'd be out in the community, in neighbors' homes, and be able to witness firsthand how important that equipment is there.

This week the National Association for the Support of Long Term Care and its members are in Washington to represent ancillary providers of products and services in the post-acute care industry. Now, as part of this work, these individuals will be garnering signatures on a letter that calls on CMS, Medicare Administrator Tavenner, to delay implementation of the widely criticized Medicare Durable Medical Equipment, Prosthetics, Orthotics and Supplies Competitive Bidding Program.

Now, this competitive bidding program—and believe me, it was misnamed when it was passed; there's nothing competitive about it—was intended to reduce Medicare costs, ensure that beneficiaries have access to quality services. In practice, the system denies competition while worsening access to quality goods and services and harming seniors.

In many ways, their mission today in Washington reminds me of one of my favorite movies, and a piece of our his-

tory in this country, the Apollo 13 mission. The story of Apollo 13 is that what could have been the worst space disaster in history became one of NASA's most spectacular conquests.

Everything had gone wrong. An oxygen tank exploded in the service module, damaged a nearby oxygen tank, and rocked the command and lunar modules. Mission controllers struggled to isolate the problems, with no success. The mission and the astronauts' lives were in jeopardy.

To conserve power, the astronauts had shut all of the spacecraft systems down except the radio. The carbon dioxide rose to toxic levels, and crew members managed for 6 days with hardly any food, water, or sleep in freezing temperatures. There was clear danger the astronauts might not survive, but they did.

Apollo 13 Flight Director Gene Kranz famously rallied his team to do what is necessary to get the astronauts home safely, declaring "failure is not an option."

One of NASA's greatest achievements had become not the next feat in space exploration, but the brilliant rescue of crew members aboard Apollo 13.

Similarly, when it comes to competitive bidding, failure is not an option. CMS' competitive bidding is our damaged spacecraft. Individuals in need of durable medicine equipment for prosthetics or orthotics are the flight crew. They are in danger. We need competent technical support professionals working together to achieve our mission and bring this crew home safely.

After years of bureaucratic delay and mismanagement, we're no closer to a system that works for both providers and beneficiaries—that would be the seniors of our Nation.

Now, it appears providers are being awarded contracts by CMS to provide services for round two competitive bidding that lack the required licensing or accreditation for specific States in which they're supposed to service those seniors.

I'm extremely concerned that mishandling of the bidding process is going to have a devastating impact on beneficiaries. This is a serious issue that warrants a full review of the process and a delay of round two until this fatally flawed program is fixed.

For this reason, I encourage my colleagues to sign on to this letter to Administrator Tavenner requesting a delay through the end of the year so that we can have more time to review how round one was implemented and fix the problems that exist with the administration of the program.

I'm proud to say that, as of today, we have 129 signatures from Members of the House of Representatives; and I encourage my colleagues who have not taken the opportunity to sign on to the letter to do so today.

We need to replace this fatally flawed program with one that's not just labeled competitive, but is competitive

and maintains beneficiary access to durable medical products and quality services.

THE FARM BILL

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, we have a major piece of legislation again being considered by this Congress, the farm bill. It expired in the last Congress; and, due to significant political machinations and controversies, we couldn't get it across the finish line because it was too expensive, didn't have enough reform, shortchanged nutrition and, frankly, didn't deal with the conservation elements that Americans care about.

Well, we're at it again, and the big, contentious issues remain. The direct payments appear to be gone, subsidies that go to farmers regardless of whether or not they even farm the land; but the big, contentious issues remain.

The issues of subsidization have simply migrated. There's an effort to have a shallow-loss provision or additional crop insurance subsidies that may actually end up being far more expensive than the direct payments they're supposed to be replacing.

There is an ongoing controversy regarding nutrition. The Senate bill cuts \$4 billion at a time when too many Americans are, in fact, food insecure; and food stamps, the SNAP program, plays a vital interest in communities around the country.

The House bill is even worse: \$16 billion in additional cuts that families rely upon and, frankly, that provide \$1.70 of economic activity for each dollar that is given to beneficiaries.

Well, there is one area that shouldn't be unduly controversial: the conservation title of the farm bill. The farm bill is the most important piece of environmental legislation that will be considered by this Congress. The question is whether it will be a good environmental bill or a poor one.

The conservation title deals with programs that are very, very important but that the private market doesn't provide, a market-based incentive for people to invest in. I'm talking about things that, if you asked the public generally, of course they are concerned about clean air, clean water, soil protection, wetland and grassland preservation.

□ 1040

But these are things that we've seen for the last 60 years. Unless the Federal Government steps in with either subsidy or regulation, we pay a terrible price, dating back to the monstrous soil erosion that was part of the Dust Bowl tragedy.

Here, again, we're in a situation where the conservation title is in the crosshairs. It's the conservation programs that too often have been cut

when we are in need of money. They are touted when people are encouraged to vote for the bill, and then those resources dissipate. Funding is diverted to large projects. Large, confined animal feedlot operations take huge amounts of this money to deal with something that should be part of their cost of doing business and large operations that could fund it themselves. It takes away resources from small and medium-size farmers, or drains valuable wetlands.

There's a reason why only one in four of the applications for conservation programs are approved. Because there isn't enough money and too much is diverted. I've introduced H.R. 1890, the Balancing Food, Farms, and Environment Act, which seeks to change those priorities to be able to have more money available, targeted toward small and medium-size farmers and ranchers, and be able to put a premium on longer-term conservation.

We have a bizarre situation now where, because of the amazingly bloated and inefficient farm crop insurance program, people are plowing up land that previously had been in conservation, land that's going to be eroded and that's probably going to fail because it's marginal cropland but they don't care because the Federal Government is going to pay them anyway. And the taxpayer loses twice. They pay through unnecessary crop insurance subsidies and they pay because they lose the water quality, the water quantity, the protection of wildlife habitat—and soil erosion.

By all means, let's have the political tug-of-war over unnecessary subsidization in terms of fighting nutrition, but let's come together on the conservation items, which really ought to be nonpartisan, focused, and economically productive.

U.S.-CHINA RELATIONSHIP

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

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, in a few days, China's new President, Xi Jinping, will conclude a tour of the Western Hemisphere by meeting with President Obama in an informal summit in California. The leaders of the Pacific Rim's two most powerful countries will discuss many issues of mutual concern. This important relationship continues to evolve dynamically in spite of the difficulties that we both have. These difficulties spring from some radically different philosophical outlooks on both life as well as governance. These differences deserve both our attention and candor.

Mr. Speaker, 24 years ago, this week, June 3, 1989, a massacre took place in China in a place called Tiananmen Square. Student protesters who were seeking some form of liberty for their interests gathered there. And I remember very vividly two very stark images

from that time. One was the homemade replica of the Statue of Liberty that was erected in their midst. The other was a courageous Chinese man who decided to take it upon himself to stand as a silent witness, arms at his side like a soldier at attention, for the cause of human rights. He stood in the street and blocked four tanks as they proceeded on toward the student protesters. The tanks tried to make their way around him. As they did, he would move and stand in front of them. Clearly, there was a dilemma going on in the minds of the young Chinese soldiers who were driving those tanks. Perhaps they didn't want to kill one of their countrymen. So they tried to avoid it. But the young man persisted. For a time, he blocked those tanks, courageously and alone, from carrying out part of what would become the Tiananmen Square massacre. Eventually, some of his friends or other Chinese citizens whisked him away from certain death. Those were two very stark images in my mind that have stayed with me ever since.

In the House Foreign Affairs Committee this week, another one of those student leaders actually spoke. Her name is Chai Ling. She's a courageous new American, one who knows well the tragedy of forced repression—both political repression and the painful, silent repression in China that is not spoken of enough, which is that country's forced abortion policies, its One Child policy, which has, by the way, disproportionately targeted unborn girls.

In her testimony, she spoke clearly about her passion and love for China and her hope that the United States and China can begin a new embrace in a spirit of cooperation rooted in the fundamental respect for human dignity, which transcends both language and culture. She argues that the fear that led to the devastating persecutions of the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square, and more recently, this genocidal One Child policy, which has seriously distorted China's demographic balance, must be transformed by truth. She echoes the spirit of Chen Guangcheng, the blind Chinese activist who stood up so courageously against repression last year in China. When he visited here in Washington, he said this to a small group of us: The intrinsic kindness of persons cannot be defeated by violence and force.

Mr. Speaker, dysfunction in this important bilateral relationship between the United States and China serves neither of our countries, nor the broader world, as the influence of this relationship extends far beyond our respective national borders. China wants our markets, we want their stuff and, conversely, there are incentives for our businesses to seek out their low-cost manufacturing. We want their investment, they want our resources. We sell our enterprises, we also run up our debt, and they buy the debt. In turn, we run down our economy in an endless