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We said, we value our elders. Even though the market says leave them behind, we will not. We will protect you and treat you with compassion and the dignity that you deserve in your old age.

So why do the Republicans want to privatize Medicare so badly? Maybe they have amnesia. Maybe they do not remember what happened when we left the health care of aging parents and grandparents to the free markets. Or maybe they are so swept up in their blind faith in the market that they believe that somehow the market will just take care of things. But we have already tried them and it did not work. Remember?

Taking care of the elderly is not profitable, nor should it be. Profit is not always the most important thing. These are the people that reared us. They are the people that took care of us when we were sick. They are the people that taught us right from wrong. I will not be a party to this slap in the face to my parents and to the seniors in my community being offered by the Republican majority of this body. Their bill purports to offer a prescription drug benefit for Medicare beneficiaries, but it fails to offer any guarantee that seniors will actually receive it.

The prescription drug plan is only available through private insurance companies or HMOs.

And besides all this, it does not ensure that all seniors will get this coverage. The eligibility of all seniors has been a hallmark of the Medicare program.

If that was not bad enough, in a provision of the bill completely unrelated to creating a prescription drug benefit, the House GOP bill would increase seniors' costs for doctor visits by raising the Part B premium and indexing it to inflation.

This provision is included for no other reason than to raise the cost of traditional Medicare and force seniors into Managed Care Plans.

And who does this benefit? Seniors? I think not. It benefits Insurance Companies and Pharmaceutical Manufacturers—the real constituents of the Republican Party.

Republicans are doing in this bill what they have consistently done this whole Congress: Advantaged the wealthy and the powerful and put the screws to the little guy.

Just last night, DAVID OBEY stood on this floor and asked the Republicans to cut back, from \$88,000 to \$83,000, the tax cut for those whose annual income is over 1 million dollars in order to pay for desperately needed homeland security projects.

The Republicans said “no.” Cutting taxes for the wealthy and powerful is more important.

Just a few weeks ago, I tried to offer an amendment to the tax bill that would have pushed back the start date of the dividend portion of the tax cut for 1 year—just seven-tenths of one percent of the tax cut—to fund homeland security projects to make our country safer.

The Republicans said “no.” Cutting taxes when we are in astronomical debt is more important.

How about the Child Tax credit? “No,” say the Republicans, we are not going to help out poor children or the children of veterans of a war in Iraq where Marines and Soldiers are still dying.

Today, I offered an amendment to the Medicare Bill, in order to offer a real prescription drug benefit to all seniors, and to do it through Medicare.

I hope that the committee will allow this amendment to be considered on the floor of this House. It is an important amendment because it is not designed to protect the profits of the insurance companies or the pharmaceutical industry. It is designed to help our seniors.

It is clear to me and to my Democratic colleagues where the Majority's loyalties lie. From homeland security to education, from veterans benefits to the Child Tax credit, and now finally to the health and well being of our parents and grandparents, the Republican message is clear: We do not care about you.

#### OLDER WOMEN AND MEDICARE

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

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, I want to stress the importance of a health safety net that has worked for the American people. It is our duty to protect the seniors that have contributed to society over their lifetimes. Our older constituents have built or supported most of what America is today and we owe them respect. We owe them the safety net that is called Medicare.

I want Congress to know that not only is Medicare important for the American people, it is a huge issue for America's women. Women, indeed, are the face of Medicare. Women constitute 58 percent of the Medicare population at 65, and women constitute 71 percent of the Medicare population over the age of 85. Women can expect to live on the average 19 years into retirement, while men can only expect to live 15 years. We must take care of our mothers, our sisters, and our daughters. We can do no less.

Across the breadth of the United States, the older and the poorer the woman, the higher the out-of-pocket health costs. The more she needs assistance, the less she will actually receive. Because of barriers to enrollment, close to half of older women with incomes below the poverty line are not enrolled in Medicaid. Research suggests that women on Medicare spend 20 percent more on prescription drugs than their male counterparts. Middle class women who have made wise financial planning decisions, can quickly find that high drug costs will eat away any retirement security they have worked to establish.

Mr. Speaker, I want to give you some thoughts on cultural diversity in regards to women and Medicare. More minority women than Caucasian women are uninsured or rely on public rather than private health insurance. Minority women are more likely to

have lower incomes and to live in poverty than other women. The percentage of women on Medicare with incomes of less than \$10,000 a year is a very telling statistic. Twenty-four percent of white women, or 14.7 million; 56 percent of African women, and there are 1.8 million; and 58 percent of Latina women, and there are 1.2 million, live way below the poverty line. Clearly, not only should we strengthen the safety net but we should find out why so many women need that net.

So, Mr. Speaker, a health safety net for the American person is imperative. Our older constituents have built or supported most of what America is today, and we owe them a great amount of gratitude. They should go to bed each evening feeling secure that they have health benefits when they are needed. They should know that their benefits are universal and affordable.

What a shame, a shame, that our seniors have to leave the United States and go to Canada or Mexico, where the same prescription drugs, same ingredients, are much, much cheaper. We have seniors who are eating dog food rather than regular food because they have to pay the cost of these expensive drugs.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, these older Americans should be given a benefit that they can rely on, that they will know they can live a quality of life with respect rather than the one they would have to live if we whittle away at Medicare. Let us honor our seniors.

#### REPUBLICAN PRESCRIPTION DRUG BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. BERKLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. BERKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I oppose the Republican prescription drug plan. I represent the fastest growing Congressional District in the United States. I represent the fastest growing senior citizen population in the United States. When I came to Congress, I thought I would modernize Medicare, improve Medicare, strengthen Medicare. I never dreamed that I would participate in the destruction of Medicare. This legislation before us this week destroys the Medicare system.

I oppose this plan. It does not offer a guaranteed prescription drug benefit for seniors. It ends traditional Medicare that seniors in my district and throughout the United States rely on. Under this Republican proposal, there is no guarantee that private insurance companies will offer prescription drug coverage. While Republicans estimate that the cost of the premium would be \$35, the fact is we do not know how much the premium is going to be. Private insurance companies can devise their own plan and raise premiums whenever they want to meet their bottom line rather than meet the needs of our senior citizens.

The Republican plan does not guarantee that seniors will receive any help