Mr. NETHERCUTT. Mr. Speaker, America is faced with a continuing dilemma: maintaining adequate food supply at reasonable prices for consumers while providing incentives for farmers to grow the crops needed in the country.

In 1980, food became a weapon of foreign policy with the imposition of the infamous Russian grain embargo. That embargo created huge crop surpluses and the result was massive commodity price declines. By 1981 farmers were looking to the Government for relief, because the Government-imposed embargo created the problem. Our Government then became the only market for farm products because foreign competitors filled the void created by restrictions on U.S. exports. Now, many of these countries have captured a great portion of former U.S. markets.

American farmers continue to face unfair pricing practices from the Australian Wheat Board and the Canadian Wheat Board. European Union farmers receive approximately $40 billion in government subsidies. American farmers can compete with foreign farmers, but not with foreign governments. Reckless budget cuts to agriculture will leave us farther behind in the effort to develop a free market for American agriculture.

REPUBLICANS TO REGULAR FOLKS: DROP DEAD

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

Mr. GONZALEZ. Mr. Speaker, the Republicans have delivered their budget message, and what it says to regular, hard-working Americans is, in the words of a great headline: ''drop dead.''

The Republican message is that regular folks will get a lot less help to improve the schools that their kids attend; and when those kids get to college, there will be a whole lot less help to pay for it, and if they get student loans, they will pay much higher interest on those loans. For instance, they want to kill school improvement funds and totally eliminate library funding.

They would kill funds that help our schools provide special services to poor kids. They also would kill funds that allow college students to work off some of their loans through worthwhile community service—meaning that students and communities alike get hurt.

The Republican message is that if your town needs help to provide affordable housing, forget it. And if your town uses block grants to provide essential services, your town will get a 25-percent cut. In fact, the rule seems to be, if it is help for any kind of public service or public improvement, there will be a cut of at least 25 percent, and often a total wipeout.

The Republican message is, if you are sick or old or poor, or have to ride the bus to work, you will get less service or help and pay much more for what you do get.

The Republican message to regular folks is that no matter how hard you work, you will pay more and get less for every kind of public service, and you will get less help to educate yourself or your kids, and by the way, if you are hoping for some neighborhood improvements and your town needs help to finance the effort, forget that too.

At the same time the Republicans are saying they will give a tax break to the rich.

So if you are an ordinary, hard-working American citizen, the Republican message is that your life is about to get harder. The poor will be poorer, the ordinary will be harder pressed, and those who are struggling to help themselves will have to struggle harder.

The Republicans do not come right out and say it, but their message could not be plainer: They want the well-off to get better off, and the rest of us can pay for it.

ADMINISTRATION CHARGED WITH USING SCARE TACTICS, DISHONEST CLICHES IN BUDGET DEBATE

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

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, for several weeks, Democrats have attempted to use shameless scare tactics to dismiss the Republican plan to balance the budget. Americans see through this sham.

In recent days, administration officials Tyson and Panetta have suggested the budget does not really need to be balanced by the year 2002. Americans know better.

The Democrats are not fooling anybody. Even the Washington Post acknowledges that the Democrats' complaints are ''hollow and unpersuasive.'' The Post calls the Clinton administration budget ''weak and directionless.'' In fact, the Post urges the Democrats to ''stop playing it cute,'' and the President to ''lead on this issue.''

It is disconcerting that the President of the United States would abandon the American people in this manner, but he has. He refused to submit a balanced budget. Thus challenge should be tackled in a bipartisan fashion with input from the Congress and the President. Unfortunately, the President has chosen not to contribute and House Democrats offer nothing but dishonest cliches.

URGING JAPAN TO OPEN MARKETS TO AUTO PARTS IMPORTS

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

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, the United States Trade Representative has just announced tariffs, 100-percent tariffs on 13 luxury automobiles made in Japan. One of them is the Infinity Q45. This chart shows what our problem is. That car sells for $85,000 in Japan, $54,000 in the United States. It is the same car. They have to ship it here, insure it in its shipping. How does that happen?

Mr. Speaker, the reason is the Japanese shelter, they protect their home market. They do not let competition in, so they can charge their consumers anything they want, and then sell the care lower in the United States, taking the profits in Japan to try to get market share in the United States. They are keeping auto parts out made in the United States that sell for one-third or one-fourth. We say to Japan ''Open your markets. That is the issue. Open your markets. Compete. The United States is ready to compete. Won't you let us? It is about time.''

DEMOCRATS ARE DISINTERESTED IN SAVING MEDICARE, BUT ONLY USE THE ISSUE TO WAGE CLASS WARFARE

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

Mr. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, it is clear by the statements by President Clinton and most other liberal Democrats over the last week that they are not interested in saving Medicare. They did not propose any alternative, they did not propose any plan. Instead, they want to use the imminent insolvency of Medicare as an opportunity to wage class warfare.

Let me quote the trustees' report, the trustees appointed by President Clinton: They said:

> The HI Trust Fund does not meet the trustees' short-range test of financial adequacy. The fund is projected to be exhausted in the year 2001, 6 years from the present.

For our final math lesson for the day, when we increase Medicare from $4,700 a year for medical benefits received by a senior citizen to $6,300 a year for medical benefits received per senior citizen, that is an increase; $4,700 this year, $6,300 in the year 2002. That is an increase. No matter what the liberal left tells us, we are increasing Medicare.

□ 1040

REQUIRING MEDICARE TRUST FUND TRUSTEES TO REPORT CERTAIN FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1590) to require the Trustees of the Medicare trust funds to report recommendations on resolving projected financial imbalance in Medicare trust funds.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1590

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. TRUSTEES' CONCLUSIONS REGARDING FINANCIAL STATUS OF MEDICARE TRUST FUNDS.

(a) HI TRUST FUND.—The 1995 annual report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Hospital Insurance Trust Fund, submitted on

April 3, 1995, contains the following conclusions respecting the financial status of such Trust Fund:

(1) Under the Trustees' intermediate assumptions, the present financing schedule for the hospital insurance program is sufficient to ensure the payment of benefits only over the next 7 years.

(2) Under present law, hospital insurance program costs are expected to far exceed revenues over the 75-year long-range period under any reasonable set of assumptions.

(3) As a result, the hospital insurance program is severely out of financial balance and the Trustees believe that the Congress must take timely action to establish long-term financial stability for the program.

(b) SMI TRUST FUND.—The 1995 annual report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Fund, submitted on April 3, 1995, contains the following conclusions respecting the financial status of such Trust Fund:

(1) Although the supplementary medical insurance program is currently actuarially sound, the Trustees note with great concern the past and projected rapid growth in the cost of the program.

(2) In spite of the evidence of somewhat slower growth rates in the recent past, overall, the past growth rates have been rapid, and the future growth rates are projected to increase above those of the recent past.

(3) Growth rates have been so rapid that outlays of the program have increased 53 percent in aggregate and 40 percent per enrollee in the last 5 years.

(4) For the same time period, the program grew 19 percent faster than the economy despite recent efforts to control the costs of the program.

SEC. 2. RECOMMENDATIONS ON RESOLVING PROJECTED FINANCIAL IMBALANCE IN MEDICARE TRUST FUNDS.

(a) REPORT.—Not later than June 30, 1995, the Board of Trustees of the Federal Hospital Insurance Trust Fund and the Board of Trustees of the Federal Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Fund shall submit to the Congress recommendations for specific program legislation designed solely—

(1) to control medicare hospital insurance program costs and to address the projected financial imbalance in the Federal Hospital Insurance Trust Fund in both the short-range and long-range; and

(2) to more effectively control medicare supplementary medical insurance costs.

(b) USE OF INTERMEDIATE ASSUMPTIONS.—The Boards of Trustees shall use the intermediate assumptions described in the 1995 annual reports of such Boards in making recommendations under subsection (a).

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California [Mr. THOMAS] will be recognized for 20 minutes, and the gentleman from Florida [Mr. GIBBONS] will be recognized for 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California [Mr. THOMAS].

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, before us today is H.R. 1590, a bill which would have the Board of Trustees for the Federal Hospital Insurance and Supplementary Medical Insurance trust funds submit specific recommendations on how to resolve the financial crisis facing Medicare in a reasonable timeframe.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I was hoping the gentleman from Texas [Mr. ARCHER] would be here on this one because I was going to sympathize with him. This bill is not even worth the time of Congress to take up. This is a waste of time and a waste of money and a waste of effort. If you want a report like they are asking for in this, you can write the folks a letter down there and for 32 cents you can mail it to them or if it is official business, I guess it is, you can mail it under the frank and get the same response.

I thought this might be for real until I went home this weekend and one of my neighbors showed me the slick letter from the Republican National Committee in which they lay all this plot out that must have gone to the printer long before it ever became public up here, unless they send that slick magazine by the fax system. This is all laid out in the Republican national publication that is sent to all the wealthy folks in my congressional district seeking more contributions, in which they try to scare them to death by saying the Medicare system is going broke.

I was here and voted for Medicare and it had a life expectancy of a year then in the trust fund and it has never had a long life expectancy in the trust fund and a part of that is the trustees' way of telling Congress, ''Well, don't be generous with the Medicare benefits because the system's always going broke.''

Well, now it is only going to take 7 more years for it to go broke. That is a great improvement over past estimates which have been as low as 2 years and 3 years and one time it got up to 5 years. It has gotten a little further out sometimes or other during the economic cycles.

Yes, the Medicare system needs changes, incremental changes, but it is not going broke and I think that message ought to go out of here, and to be sending this bill through Congress to reinforce what the Republican National Committee is putting out is a travesty upon the Congress, it is a travesty upon the system, and it is a travesty to get the same information for a 32-cent letter to the trustees.

When you ask the trustees what is to go wrong with this program, you are asking the wrong people. You should be asking the people who have something to do with controlling the cost of expenditures in this program. They are the ones that are the experts in this area. The trustees are to just receive the money, put it in the bank and account for it and issue this annual report. They do not participate in the running of the program.

I am sorry that we are wasting this time here. I hope my Democratic colleagues will realize that this is a political ploy, not a real piece of legislation, will give it the kind of treatment it ought to have and, that is, vote ''no'' on it and let's let this thing go.

I am sorry we are costing the American public as much money as we are debating this senseless subject of asking for this trustees' report, but that is the way business is conducted around here now.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ARCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, we believe, is very important in moving us along in the process of saving Medicare so that the moneys will be there to pay the bills.

As we learned in our Committee on Ways and Means hearing on the status of the Medicare trust funds 2 weeks ago, the trust fund for part A is out of balance and heading to bankruptcy. Part B spending is increasing at an unsustainable rate, 12 percent per year.

We heard testimony expressing a sense of urgency about the condition of Medicare, an urgency which was also clearly reflected in the April 3 reports of the trustees for both parts A and part B of Medicare.

This Congress must recognize the crisis which the Medicare trustees have identified and we must act to preserve Medicare. However, first it is important to seek the most knowledgeable advice in considering a resolution for the problems facing the program. Congress should have the guidance of the administration and its Medicare trustees who have the responsibility for overseeing the entire program.

Those trustees are unquestionably in the best position considering their understanding of the Medicare program and the analytical resources at their disposal to provide guidance to the Congress as we begin this process to preserve the program.

When one reviews their combined education and training and experience in Government service and in the private sector, it is clear that they are uniquely qualified to rapidly provide us with recommendations and assistance.

Prior to his appointment as Secretary of the Treasury, the managing trustee, Secretary Robert Rubin, was responsible for overseeing the administration's domestic and international economic policymaking process. Last fall the President appointed him to cochair the President's health care reform initiative.

Secretary Shalala is currently responsible for the Medicare program and has at her disposal literally thousands of Government employees responsible for the health entitlement programs and health policy generally. She was, as chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, responsible for the oversight of a 488-bed teaching and research hospital and she had a major role in shaping the President's health care reform policy.

Commissioner Chater also has considerable experience in health care and health care policy. She holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in nursing and she was appointed by the Governor of Texas, Ann Richards, in 1991, to chair the State's health policy task force.

Secretary Reich is an economist and former professor of economics. He along with the other trustees had a key role in development of the President's health care reform initiative which contained significant reductions in the growth of the Medicare program.

H.R. 1590 would have these trustees build on their important work on the Medicare actuarial reports to provide us with suggested solutions to the financial crisis that they have identified. I am confident that as they deliberated over the financial concerns of Medicare, they felt duty bound to begin to develop a strategy to avoid the collapse that their report predicts.

I believe the American people expect their political leaders to face up to the major issues of the day in a bipartisan manner and with the executive and legislative branches working together. This legislation provides for such an approach to solving Medicare's financial problems because the 4 trustees I have described serve at the highest levels of the current administration. Their guidance will lay a useful base for the Congress to join with the President to craft a solution that assures Medicare coverage for this generation and the next.

I urge my colleagues to approve this bill so that we can get on with the important work at hand on a bipartisan, collegial basis.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Missouri [Mr. GEPHARDT], the Democratic leader.

(Mr. GEPHARDT asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GEPHARDT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to defeat this bill, to say no to this cynical strategy to force the Medicare trustees to figure out how to pay for tax cuts for the privileged few. Make no mistake about it, that is what the Republicans are trying to do with this bill. They produce a budget that reduces taxes for the wealthiest Americans, giving the richest 1 million Americans a $20,000 tax giveaway each year.

To fill that gaping budget hole, they want to carve almost exactly the same amount out of Medicare, taking money away from struggling seniors and their families to line the pockets of those who already have it made.

Americans have known for years that Republicans are no friends of Medicare. After all, many Republicans voted against the very creation of the program. Year after year when concerns have been raised about the solvency of the Medicare trust fund, about our ability to preserve Medicare benefits, not just for today's seniors but for future generations, Democrats have acted and Republicans have barely lifted a finger to help.

So why can they not just be honest about it? Why can Republicans not just say we want to cut Medicare and we want to give the money to the wealthiest Americans? If that is what they believe, they should have the courage to stand up and be proud of those beliefs.

Instead, they want to hide behind the Medicare trustees, to ask a group of overseers to make their deep and dangerous Medicare cuts. But we are talking about Medicare trustees, not tax cut trustees. To ask them to fund the Republican giveaways for the wealthy is to degrade their very purpose, to make them pawns to an extremist agenda. It is wrong and we should not stand for it.

Republicans claim to be concerned about the solvency of the trust fund. They say that they want to save Medicare. But if that were true, why would they have refused to help Democrats improve Medicare year after year until they needed a way to pay for tax breaks for the privileged few?

And why would they propose tax breaks that are far deeper than any that would be needed to ensure the solvency of the trust fund, following the time-honored Republican maxim, give tax breaks first, then ask questions later.

Mr. Speaker, I don't need a commission or a political fig leaf to tell me what these cuts would do to America's working families. In my State of Missouri, seniors would see their benefits slashed by $873 a year by the year 2002. A story on the front page of today's New York Times says there is simply no way to make these cuts, the largest Medicare cuts in history, without, and I quote, real pain.

The Times even quotes a Republican health policy expert as saying, and I quote, some of the providers will probably not survive the pressure. In other words, hospitals will close or cut services, not just for seniors but for everybody.

Last week's Washington post quotes confidential Republican memos that show very clearly that under their plan Medicare deductibles will go up, premiums will increase, charges the Republicans continue to deny.

We need to talk openly and honestly about improving Medicare and making the trust fund solvent but not as a way to pay for tax breaks for the privileged few. Medicare is a trust fund. It is not a slush fund. It is about health care, not stealth agendas. This bill is nothing more than a political ploy and frankly while I do not agree with very much of the Republican agenda, I never expected them to try to hide from their own agenda.

Reject this bill. Throw away the fig leaf, and then let's have a real debate about Medicare based on policy, not on tax breaks for the privileged few.

Mr. ARCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3½ minutes to the gentleman from California [Mr. THOMAS], the respected chairman of the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Ways and Means.

(Mr. THOMAS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minority leader for a wonderful speech as he leaves the floor because it is not a speech for this particular bill at this particular time. It is an excellent political speech for some time in the future, perhaps. Today we have on the floor H.R. 1590. What it does is ask the trustees to tell us what their suggestions are as to how to save the trust fund. Last week, the full Committee on Ways and Means met and the trustees presented their report. In the conclusion, the trustees said that experience to date suggests that the prospective payment system has worked but extension of this payment system to other providers could provide another 5 to 10 years before the fund is depleted.

We are asking them to give us the specifics on their recommendation, on their conclusion of their report.

In addition, the report goes on to say, to facilitate this effort, the trustees further recommend legislation. They go on to suggest legislation in their report.

The minority leader was feeling very good about talking about tax cuts and Medicare. That is simply oil and water on the floor this morning. The bill says to report back, submit to the Congress recommendations for specific program legislation designed solely—solely—one, to control Medicare hospital insurance program costs and to address the projected financial imbalance in the Federal hospital insurance trust fund in both the short and long range, and to more effectively control Medicare supplementary medical insurance costs—period.

That is what H.R. 1590 asks for. On the committee hearing, we asked the Secretary to provide some suggestions. She said she would be providing none. Had the administration been willing to cooperate and address the shortfall of funds in an openhanded, working together method, we would not be here on the floor asking this House to pass H.R. 1590. We must require the trustees to provide us with what they hinted at as one of the sources for changes.

As the minority leader attempted to raise the specter of partisanship in trying to solve the health care funding program for our seniors, I just would suggest that perhaps he and a few other Democrats look at health affairs, winter 1994, and an article by Guy King.

Who was Guy King? Guy King was the chief actuary of the Health Care Financing Administration from 1978 until July 1994, and played a significant role in developing the cost estimates for the Clinton administration's health care reform proposal.

One of the chief architects of the President's health care reform proposal said, ''Even President Clinton's proposed health care reform legislation, with its ambitious and highly controversial cuts in the Medicare Program, would have had only a minor effect on the deepening financial crisis of

Medicare part A, hypothetically extending the life of the program by only a couple of years at most.''

The program has been in trouble for several years, the President's proposal would have bought only a couple of years, with all due respect to my friend from Florida, the trustees say this program is in trouble. Regardless of the arguments of making it a partisan argument, the seniors expect and deserve solutions to make sure that Medicare is sound.

Who else but the trustees of the program should be asked, what are your ideas to make the program sound?

Pass H.R. 1590.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Washington [Mr. MCDERMOTT].

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, this bill is nothing more than a sham and a public relations gesture to mask the fact that Republicans are proposing $283 billion in Medicare cuts to pay for tax cuts to the well-off.

If Republicans care so much about Medicare, why did they not wait for policy recommendations before proposing Medicare cuts? This is a classic case of slash first and ask questions later.

The fact that cuts are proposed before getting advice is the smoking gun that proves that the Republican's real intent is to cut Medicare regardless of any objective recommendation.

We know why they have to cut Medicare. Medicare is the only place where Republicans can find enough money to pay for their Contract on America.

If Republicans care so much about Medicare, why did they take $87 billion in earmarked funds out of the Medicare trust fund to pay for tax cuts to wealthy seniors?

What makes this bill so obviously a sham is that the Medicare trustees who are being required by this bill to provide policy advice on the Medicare trust fund have absolutely no authority or basis for making policy recommendations. They are not Medicare experts or health policy experts. They are accounting fiduciaries.

But the Republicans did not go to the policy arms of Congress for recommendations. They went to the entity least able to provide recommendations and not designed to engage in policy functions.

They were afraid that the policy experts would tell them that they cannot slash Medicare without terrible consequences for Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and the health care delivery system.

They were afraid the policy experts would tell them that they have to expand coverage for everyone if Medicare is to be really safe.

They were afraid the people who know what they are talking about would tell them that Medicare savings need to be kept in the health care delivery system to improve coverage for seniors and their families.

Mr. Speaker, Republicans just discovered the trust fund problem while Democrats have worked successfully for decades to incrementally improve and extend the trust fund viability each year, often against the backdrop of Republican opposition.

The Nation that we suddenly need a 30-year solution by June 30 from an entity totally unsuited to the assignment does not even pass the straight face test.

We will address the trust fund problem as we always have. But we will address it outside the context of tax cuts and budget politics. We will address Medicare and the trust fund in the context of health policy, not arbitrary budget targets.

We will address the trust fund in the context of health reform that keeps our entire health care system stable, not according to campaign manifestos that Republicans never dreamed they would actually have to use to govern.

But we will never be able to give the American people confidence in the government, if Republicans continue to substitute ridiculous gimmicks like this bill for substantive approaches to health security for senior citizens and every American.

□ 1100

Mr. ARCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. ENGLISH], a respected member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Mr. ENGLISH of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1590, a bill to require the Medicare trustees to submit to Congress real legislative recommendations that will keep Medicare from going broke.

Mr. Speaker, prior to taking office, in my previous career, I served as a public trustee of a major municipal pension system, and in that pension system I felt I had the fiduciary responsibility to preserve that system by recommending certain courses of action.

Unfortunately, the Medicare trustees currently have no legal obligation, notwithstanding their moral obligation, to use their expertise to guide Congress in preserving Medicare.

The trustees have told us notwithstanding what you have heard on the floor today unambiguously that the Medicare part A fund will go bankrupt by 2002.

Now we need the trustees to give us real options on how we can continue to grow Medicare at a rate where we can preserve it for future generations, and also protect the benefits of senior citizens.

The Clinton trustees, Donna Shalala, Robert Reich, Robert Rubin, Shirley Chater, have so far refused to offer Congress any real options. This bill would make them do it. Let us vote for it.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Oregon [Mr. WYDEN].

(Mr. WYDEN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. Speaker, every Member of this body knows that Medicare needs reform. But Medicare reform is a heat-seeking missile, and the purpose of this bill is to have Republicans avoid taking any heat. It is a last-minute idea to get someone else to make massive cuts in Medicare that are going to hurt seniors.

It cannot be done in 30 days in a reasonable fashion. It stops the trustees from looking at health care reform as it should be, in a systematic way. It is a mistake. It is going to be bad for the Nation's older people.

I urge my colleagues to vote against it.

Mr. ARCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Texas, Mr. SAM JOHNSON, another respected member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this bill to require the Medicare Board of Trustees to make recommendations on resolving the financial crisis in Medicare. They reported on April 3 that the Medicare trust fund is going to be bankrupt at the latest by the year 2002. If nothing is done, this trust fund is going to go bankrupt and there will be no Medicare.

Clearly, this is not something that we can choose to address. It is something we must address.

Medicare is not simply a budget issue and should not be used merely to score political points. Our Nation's seniors deserve better than that.

Everyone, the Congress, the President, and his Cabinet must fulfill the duties of their offices by acknowledging the problem and offering solutions. So far the White House and Democrat congressional leadership have chosen to ignore the crisis in Medicare, and that is why this bill is necessary.

I hope the administration is listening. By refusing to address Medicare, they jeopardize the entire system. Americans say help us save Medicare. Vote ''yes'' on this bill.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California [Mr. WAXMAN], a real expert in medical care.

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman very much for yielding time to me.

Mr. Speaker, this debate has nothing to do with the saving of the Medicare part A trust fund. The Republicans are looking for huge cuts in Medicare, $283 billion over 7 years, far beyond any amount that is going to be needed reasonably to extend the solvency of the part A trust fund.

What is really going on here is that the Republicans' pollsters have told them if they are going to come out and cut Medicare to this extent the American people will not stand for it, so instead they have developed this ruse about the Medicare trust fund. It is very much like what went on in Vietnam. We burn down a village in order to save people. They want to burn

down Medicare in order to save the part A trust fund.

I must say this is hypocritical. This trustee group that looks at the part A side is not the proper organization to give us the proposals for the massive cuts the Republicans are urging upon us. And we are being told that they can do it in 30 days, which is impossible.

And third, they are being told to come up with proposals for these kinds of reductions in Medicare far beyond what is needed to save the trust fund. But they cannot look at the whole health care system. They cannot look at the impact of these massive cuts, not just on the elderly, but on average working Americans who are going to lose their health insurance as well.

Mr. Speaker, I urge defeat of this proposal. I urge defeat of the budget that calls for these Medicare cuts, and I urge defeat of all of those who are going to go to the polls next year saying they saved Medicare by cutting it and gutting it.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Nebraska [Mr. CHRISTENSEN], a valued member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Mr. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, Medicare is going broke, there is no doubt about that. The trustees of the Medicare trust fund, including four Clinton appointees, announced beginning next year that Medicare will spend more than it takes in. By 2002 it will be completely bankrupt. If this happens, no one in America will have Medicare, no one.

What did the Clinton appointees say? On page 13 they said under present law there is no authority to pay hospital insurance benefits if the assets of the HI trust fund are depleted.

On page 3 they said under all of the sets of assumptions, the trust fund is projected to become exhausted even before the major demographic shift begins. That is before the baby boomers hit.

What did President Clinton say? That is even harder to find, because he did not say anything. He did not say anything in the State of the Union Address, he did not even mention it in his budget. I think he has taken a walk on this issue.

I believe that the Republican leadership is dedicated to reforming, preserving, and improving Medicare. I believe the board of trustees should do the very same thing.

H.R. 1590 will simply require the board of trustees to give us their input on how to solve the Medicare crisis. It is as simple as that.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. LEVIN], another real expert in medical care.

(Mr. LEVIN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I think there is a problem that we face with Medicare, but here is what this bill says: We Republicans will be general; you Democrats be specific. The Republicans are saying we will supply the sugar deficit reduction, you provide the medicine.

That is bad politics and bad policy. I say to the Republicans, say what you mean. All you talk about is generalities, setting up a commission.

Are higher part B premiums likely under your proposal, a deductible increase, a coinsurance for home health, a coinsurance for skilled nursing, et cetera?

This document that you have brought here is nothing but a smokescreen. It is an effort to try to avoid the responsibility that you have to be specific.

I urge that we vote against this because you are trying to default in your obligations and shift it to somebody else, and that will not work.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Florida [Mr. BILIRAKIS], chairman of the Subcommittee on Health and Environment of the Committee on Commerce.

(Mr. BILIRAKIS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation. As a Member of Congress who represents one of the largest concentrations of older Americans in the United States, I am quite troubled by the 1995 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Hospital Insurance and Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Funds. In their 1995 report, as has already been reported here many times. The trustees urged Congress to examine the Medicare Program because both trust funds are facing serious financial problems in both the short-term and the long-term.

The trustees expressed deep concern about the growth of the program's costs, especially given the past and projected costs of the program. The trustees also urged Congress to control the costs of the Medicare Program through legislation as part of ''broad-based health care reform'' because they indicated that ''prompt, effective, and decisive action is necessary,'' using their words.

Mr. Speaker, the Medicare hospital insurance trust fund is financially out of balance, but spending growth by the supplementary medical insurance [SMI] part B trust fund also is a concern because the rate of growth is unsustainable. The cost growth directly affects Medicare beneficiary part B premiums as well as general revenues from which the largest share of SMI costs are financed.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all have to maybe look in the mirror and ask ourselves a question. Are we all truly concerned about saving Medicare or will we continue to use it as political demagogery as is done by some election after election. Maybe the fear is that if we solve the Medicare problem, it will not any longer be available for demagogery.

Considering the serious nature of this matter, the Congress in a bipartisan way, and I have not heard much bipartisanship here this morning, in a bipartisan way, and the White House must work together. We must protect current and future Medicare beneficiaries from the looming financial crisis.

The trustees have evaluated very carefully the Medicare program in great detail. They now must follow through. We have to basically mandate that they follow through with their recommendations to the Congress for legislative reform, and that is what this legislation is all about. It is a step in the right direction and will enable us to find solutions to the Medicare crisis.

For this important reason, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. BONIOR], the distinguished assistant Democratic leader.

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, Republicans do not seem to understand, Medicare is a trust fund, a trust fund, not a slush fund, a trust between the people and their Government.

In their budget Republicans propose cutting Medicare by $288 billion in order to pay for tax breaks for the wealthiest few in our society, but they refuse to say exactly where these cuts will come from. Instead, they are trying to get someone else to do their dirty work.

First they tried to pass it off on the President, and that did not work. Then they tried to pass it off on House Democrats, and that did not work. So now they are trying to pass it off on the Medicare trustees' board.

There is not a single senior citizen representative who sits on this board, not one, and we all know what is going on here, Mr. Speaker.

□ 1115

Republicans have what the New York Times calls a secret plan to cut Medicare. That means higher deductibles, higher premiums, more copays for lab tests, for home health care, for skilled nursing care, and importantly, less choice of doctor for every senior citizen in America.

How are they going to do this? Well, in this resolution they are trying to hide behind the unelected board that does not have one senior representative sitting on it.

Let us be honest what is happening here: Their cuts in Medicare are not going to fix the Medicare system. If that is what they wanted to do, they would just do it. Senior citizens are going to pay $1,000 a year to give tax breaks to the wealthiest people and the wealthiest corporations in America. That is what their Medicare proposal does outlined in their memo. That is not fair. The American people know it is not fair.

Republicans cannot hide behind this meaningless resolution. I urge my colleagues to vote ''no'' on this resolution.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Arizona [Mr. KOLBE].

(Mr. KOLBE asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KOLBE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1590, and I commend the chairman, the gentleman from Texas [Mr. ARCHER] and the chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from California [Mr. THOMAS] for their foresight in soliciting the views of the Medicare trustees on how we should address this problem.

We have heard from at least a couple of speakers on the other side a very cute phrase, ''It is a trust fund, not a slush fund.'' The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, the trustees have said their trust fund, our trust fund, the seniors' trust fund, is going broke. It is bankrupt. They will not legally be able to make any payments out of it if we do not do something to fix it.

In fact, they said very clearly in their report, ''Medicare program is clearly unsustainable in its present form.'' And they said, ''We strongly recommend the crisis presented by the financial condition of the Medicare trust funds be urgently addressed on a comprehensive basis.'' They are the fiduciary trustees. They are in a position to know something about the problems. They are in a position to make recommendations.

I think it is ironic that the detractors of this legislation argue that it is a political gimmick. Nobody argues it is going bankrupt. We cannot ignore it. We have to do something. We need to act now.

The Congress has a historic opportunity to do something about it. The trustees are in a position to help us, tell us what to do about it, make those recommendations. We should solicit their advice. Does it not make sense to hear from the experts, the fiduciary experts responsible for this trust fund?

We should vote ''yes'' on H.R. 1590.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Florida [Mr. WELDON].

Mr. WELDON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me this time.

Prior to coming here to the U.S. Congress, I was a practicing physician in Florida. I, indeed, took care of a lot of Medicare patients. Fully half of my clinical practice was in taking care of Medicare patients, and I got to see firsthand the tremendous value to those people of having this program, particularly those low-income seniors who always were very comforted by the knowledge they could have access to good quality medical care under this program.

Unfortunately today, the way things stand, this program stands the real possibility of going bankrupt, and we, as Republicans, are proposing that we save the Medicare Program. We are not cutting anything. What we want to do is control the growth of the program.

Today in America, the Government spends $4,600 per senior citizen, and we are talking about allowing that program to grow to about $6,300 per senior.

But our colleagues on the other side of the aisle and the President, they propose no program, but just to let this program grow to the extent that it would cost $8,600 per senior citizen, and we are seeing we need to look at this program in a way to save it, to help our seniors to continue to have the quality access to medical care that they demand, that they deserve, and the Republicans are ready to act.

We are asking for some serious input from the trustees of the Medicare Program, and I support this bill, and I urge all of my colleagues to vote for it.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield the remainder of my time to the gentleman from California [Mr. STARK] who, I think, knows more about this program than any Member of Congress, House or Senate.

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the distinguished ranking member for that eloquent introduction.

It is obvious that there are some people on the other side of the aisle who think they know more about this bill and about the Medicare program, but if this bill were not such a cheap, cynical effort to manipulate public opinion, I would be tempted to ignore it. It is not needed, and it accomplishes nothing, and nothing that cannot be done now without legislation.

It is technically flawed. It asks the wrong people to render opinions on issues that are not within their jurisdiction or their area of expertise or their mandate. At best, this is suggesting that the dog ate the homework. It is a prime example of Washington run amok, wasting everybody's time, money and creating unnecessary bureaucratic mishmaw when the majority is blindly casting about for someone else to fulfill its responsibility. They really have a responsibility to propose a budget along with the details that are necessary to meet the fairy tale requirements in their budget. No amount of effort to shift the responsibility to someone else is going to hide the basic fact that the Republican Party is intellectually bankrupt. It is offering us a flimsy outline of a radical fairy tale world populated by rich, white suburban lawyers and MBA's, a world without aging or poverty, with education by osmosis, and beggars on white stallions. Oh, to be a young Republican and naive.

Mr. DEUTSCH. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. STARK. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. DEUTSCH. Mr. Speaker, I wish to highlight a question to the distinguished chairman. Last year the facts regarding the program were the same, and in your subcommittee, I was curious about the Republican Members of the Republican leadership in terms of their response to the attempts with the program last year.

Mr. STARK. Reclaiming my time, the gentleman raises a very good question. Last year we had a health reform bill. We laid out specific Medicare savings. It would have reduced Medicare spending by about $168 billion over 7 years and improved the status of the trust fund, and we did not wait for the President's proposals, nor did we rely on alarming statements about the status of the trust fund, nor did we try and scare the seniors. We worked, and we came up with a balanced, fair, health reform plan that provided coverage for all Americans, and every one of the Republicans on the subcommittee and the full committee voted against those cuts. They turned their back on the medical trust fund last year when they had a chance to help seniors and other Americans who did not have health care. Where were they then? They took a walk.

And now they are still taking a walk. They still have not figured out what to do, and they are asking us to buy into this cockamammie plan.

The gentleman rises a great issue. Every Republican on the committee voted against bringing these savings. Ironically, the only action taken thus far by the other side for the solvency of the trust fund is to give seniors, rich seniors, a tax cut, and take it out of the trust fund, to take $87 billion over 10 years and give it to the richest seniors and cut the money out of the Medicare part A trust fund. That is the only thing they have come up with so far.

Why not do what the chairman of the Committee on the Budget has done and let the committee work its will, come out with details, show us what they are planning to do, as our minority leader and as our distinguished whip showed us in their comments just a moment ago, that they plan to cut the poorest of the Medicare beneficiaries, to increase their co-pays, to deny them choice of doctors and plans, to give them vouchers that will not work?

I urge you to show the emperor-Speaker has no clothes and vote ''no'' on this silly bill.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from California is quite right. Last year the attempts to adjust the Medicare program were contained in an ill-conceived, comprehensive national health care program that had three things wrong with it: A majority of the Democrats did not support it, a majority of the Republicans did not support it, and a majority of the American people did not support it.

I will also say, in his attempt to reach for rhetoric, I am personally embarrassed for the gentleman from California to say the members of the board of trustees of the HI trust fund and the supplemental Medicare insurance trust

fund do not have any knowledge about how to fix the program. Perhaps the gentleman, in his wisdom, forgot that one of the trustees was the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Rubin. Perhaps he forgot one of the trustees was the Secretary of Health and Human Services who oversees the entire Medicare program. She is one of the trustees. Perhaps the gentleman, in his rhetorical splendor, forgot that Shirley F. Chater, Commissioner of Social Security, is one of the trustees. Those are all President Clinton's appointees who are charged with running the program, besides statutorily being trustees of the trust fund. They have responsibility.

In their report they suggested in a general way legislative changes. Read the conclusion of the trustees' report. They said generally we should take programs that are in effect and extend them to other areas. What H.R. 1590 asks is to be specific in the recommendations that those trustees made, including the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

In addition, there has been great weight placed on linking fixing Medicare with tax cuts and arguing that our attempt to fix Medicare is because we want to spend it on taxes. Where were you folks a couple of months ago when the House of Representatives voted out tax cuts that were fully funded? Was a piece of Medicare funding used for those tax cuts? Yes. What was it? The only Medicare cuts suggested by President Clinton in his fiscal year 1996 budget. They totaled a munificent $10 billion, and they were extenders of current limitations. That is all the Democrats have offered from the Clinton administration. We accepted those and included them in the fully funded tax cuts.

What is in front of us is the bankruptcy of Medicare. Listen carefully: ''Today Medicaid and Medicare are going up at 3 times the rate of inflation. We propose to let it go up at 2 times the rate of inflation. Today Medicare beneficiaries get $4,700. In 2002, we propose $6,300.'' That is going up, that is not going down. Who said, ''Today Medicaid and Medicare are going up at 3 times the rate of inflation. We propose to let it go up at 2 times the rate of inflation?'' President Clinton 2 years ago.

How interesting when you see an opportunity to make political hay with seniors. You refuse to give responsible suggestions for change.

H.R. 1590 is a responsible suggestion for change, and we urge its passage.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California [Mr. THOMAS] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1590.

The question was taken.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Evidently a quorum is not present.

The Sergeant at Arms will notify absent Members.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 247, nays 170, not voting 17, as follows:

[Roll No. 330]

YEAS—247

Allard
Archer
Armey
Bachus
Baesler
Baker (CA)
Baker (LA)
Ballenger
Barr
Barrett (NE)
Bartlett
Barton
Bass
Bateman
Bereuter
Bilbray
Bilirakis
Bliley
Blute
Boehlert
Boehner
Bonilla
Bono
Brewster
Brownback
Bryant (TN)
Bunn
Bunning
Burr
Burton
Buyer
Callahan
Calvert
Camp
Canady
Castle
Chabot
Chambliss
Chapman
Chenoweth
Christensen
Chrysler
Clinger
Coble
Coburn
Collins (GA)
Combest
Condit
Cooley
Cox
Crane
Crapo
Cremeans
Cubin
Cunningham
Davis
Deal
DeLay
Diaz-Balart
Dickey
Doolittle
Dornan
Dreier
Duncan
Dunn
Ehlers
Ehrlich
Emerson
English
Ensign
Everett
Ewing
Fawell
Fields (TX)
Flanagan
Foley
Forbes
Fowler
Fox
Franks (CT)
Franks (NJ)
Frelinghuysen
Frisa
Funderburk
Gallegly
Ganske
Gekas
Geren
Gilchrest
Gillmor
Gilman
Goodlatte
Goodling
Gordon
Goss
Graham
Green
Greenwood
Gunderson
Gutknecht
Hall (TX)
Hancock
Hansen
Hastert
Hastings (WA)
Hayes
Hayworth
Hefley
Heineman
Herger
Hilleary
Hoekstra
Hoke
Horn
Hostettler
Houghton
Hunter
Hutchinson
Hyde
Inglis
Johnson (CT)
Johnson, Sam
Jones
Kasich
Kelly
Kim
King
Kingston
Klug
Knollenberg
Kolbe
LaHood
Largent
Latham
LaTourette
Laughlin
Lazio
Leach
Lewis (CA)
Lewis (KY)
Lightfoot
Linder
Livingston
LoBiondo
Longley
Lucas
Manzullo
Martini
McCollum
McCrery
McDade
McHugh
McInnis
McIntosh
McKeon
Metcalf
Meyers
Mica
Miller (FL)
Molinari
Moorhead
Morella
Murtha
Myers
Myrick
Nethercutt
Neumann
Ney
Norwood
Nussle
Orton
Oxley
Packard
Parker
Paxon
Petri
Pombo
Porter
Portman
Pryce
Quillen
Quinn
Radanovich
Ramstad
Regula
Riggs
Roberts
Rohrabacher
Ros-Lehtinen
Roth
Roukema
Royce
Salmon
Sanford
Saxton
Scarborough
Schaefer
Schiff
Seastrand
Sensenbrenner
Shadegg
Shaw
Shays
Shuster
Sisisky
Skeen
Smith (MI)
Smith (NJ)
Smith (TX)
Smith (WA)
Solomon
Souder
Spence
Stearns
Stenholm
Stockman
Stump
Talent
Tate
Tauzin
Taylor (MS)
Taylor (NC)
Thomas
Thornberry
Tiahrt
Torkildsen
Torricelli
Traficant
Upton
Visclosky
Vucanovich
Waldholtz
Walker
Walsh
Wamp
Watts (OK)
Weldon (FL)
Weldon (PA)
Weller
White
Whitfield
Wicker
Wolf
Young (AK)
Young (FL)
Zeliff
Zimmer

NAYS—170

Abercrombie
Andrews
Baldacci
Barrett (WI)
Becerra
Beilenson
Bentsen
Bevill
Bishop
Bonior
Borski
Boucher
Browder
Brown (CA)
Brown (FL)
Brown (OH)
Bryant (TX)
Cardin
Clay
Clayton
Clement
Clyburn
Coleman
Collins (MI)
Conyers
Costello
Cramer
Danner
de la Garza
DeFazio
DeLauro
Dellums
Deutsch
Dicks
Dingell
Dixon
Doggett
Dooley
Doyle
Durbin
Edwards
Engel
Eshoo
Evans
Farr
Fattah
Fazio
Fields (LA)
Filner
Frank (MA)
Frost
Furse
Gejdenson
Gephardt
Gibbons
Gonzalez
Gutierrez
Hall (OH)
Hamilton
Harman
Hastings (FL)
Hefner
Hilliard
Hinchey
Holden
Hoyer
Jackson-Lee
Jacobs
Jefferson
Johnson (SD)
Johnson, E. B.
Johnston
Kanjorski
Kaptur
Kennedy (MA)
Kennedy (RI)
Kennelly
Kildee
Klink
LaFalce
Lantos
Levin
Lewis (GA)
Lincoln
Lofgren
Lowey
Luther
Maloney
Manton
Markey
Martinez
Mascara
Matsui
McCarthy
McDermott
McHale
McKinney
McNulty
Meehan
Meek
Menendez
Mfume
Miller (CA)
Mineta
Minge
Mink
Moakley
Mollohan
Montgomery
Moran
Nadler
Neal
Oberstar
Obey
Olver
Ortiz
Owens
Pallone
Pastor
Payne (NJ)
Payne (VA)
Pelosi
Peterson (MN)
Pickett
Pomeroy
Poshard
Rahall
Rangel
Reed
Richardson
Rivers
Roemer
Rose
Roybal-Allard
Rush
Sabo
Sanders
Sawyer
Schroeder
Schumer
Scott
Serrano
Skaggs
Skelton
Slaughter
Spratt
Stark
Stokes
Studds
Stupak
Tanner
Tejeda
Thompson
Thornton
Thurman
Towns
Velazquez
Vento
Volkmer
Ward
Waters
Watt (NC)
Waxman
Williams
Wilson
Wise
Woolsey
Wyden
Wynn
Yates

NOT VOTING—17

Ackerman
Barcia
Berman
Collins (IL)
Coyne
Flake
Foglietta
Ford
Hobson
Istook
Kleczka
Lipinski
Peterson (FL)
Reynolds
Rogers
Torres
Tucker

□ 1148

Mr. KANJORSKI changed his vote from ''yea'' to ''nay.''

So (two-thirds not having voted in favor thereof) the motion was rejected.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 995

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that my name be removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 995.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Colorado?

There was no objection.

PERMISSION FOR ALL COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES TO SIT TODAY AND BALANCE OF THE WEEK DURING 5-MINUTE RULE

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I offer a privileged motion.