MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, the Republican Congress has put forward a budget blueprint to cut Medicare by $270 billion, but have yet to illustrate how they are going to slash this program.

Many constituents have written me expressing grave concern about the largest cuts in Medicare history and have asked how they will affect them. Unfortunately, I do not have definite answers to my constituents' concerns.

My fear is that the Republicans are going to rush Medicare changes through the House of Representatives in September within a matter of days and attempt to force a vote on this issue before the American public has an opportunity to examine how these cuts will impact them.

This is not the proper way to run Government or be honest with the American public.

If the Republicans truly wanted to improve Medicare, then they wouldn't start by just cutting money from the program.

They are making their cuts on the backs of senior citizens and threatening the Medicare Contract With America's Seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to express my concern over the House action earlier this week to reverse the Stokes-Boehlert amendment to the VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies appropriations bill.

The supporters of this amendment were trying to prevent a package of measures limiting the EPA's ability to improve, implement, and enforce environmental regulations.

These curbs on the EPA's ability to enforce air and water quality standards are now unfortunately back in the bill which passed the House on Monday. They limit EPA's ability to spend funds on activities related to the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, RCRA, and Superfund—they even prevent the EPA from establishing drinking water standards for radon and arsenic—both known carcinogens.

These provisions are terrible in terms of the effects they will have on the environment.

One provision in particular prohibits EPA from using funds to assess any penalty where the state gives the polluter immunity from prosecution because the polluter voluntarily conducts an environmental audit.

I think most people in America would agree that no corporation should be able to pollute without paying the price.

Yet, the language that is included in this bill prevents EPA from assessing a penalty whether or not a state takes any action against a violator. In essence, the polluter is immune from an EPA assessed penalty whether they correct their violation or not.

The self-audit privilege in this bill does nothing to help the good guys—those businesses and individuals that are trying to comply with the law—while it can easily serve as a shield to hide behind for conscious yet continuing violators.

The result will be that those who are working to be in compliance with the law now will still work toward that end, while those who choose to violate the law will have an out from penalization.

The bill already cuts EPA's enforcement budget in half. This and other provisions only serve to tie the agency's hands further by compromising its ability to enforce environmental regulations.

It is the enforcement of these regulations that have increased the quality of the water we drink and fish and swim in and the quality of the air we breath. Without enforcement, the statutes we have on the books become hollow.

If it wasn't offensive enough that these provisions were in the bill to begin with, it is even more offensive that after the environmental victory of voting them out, this body voted to put them back into the bill again.

REPUBLICAN MEDICARE SPENDING REDUCTIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Hawaii [Mrs. MINK] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MINK of Hawaii. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express deep concern about proposed Republican Medicare spending cuts.

All the evidence—an increasing Medicare-aged population, extended life expectancies, and inflation—points to Medicare costs rising 7.7 percent per year. Yet, the Republicans are budgeting for only a 5.8 percent per year Medicare growth rate. Holding the Medicare growth rate to 5.8 percent ignores the fact that the percentage of older and less healthy Medicare recipients is increasing. Since 1966, the percentage of Medicare recipients in the various age groups has undergone the following changes:

[In percent]

Age group	1965	Present
85 and older	7	11
80–84	10	13
75–79	20	20
70–74	28	26
65–69	34	30

The resulting gap between Medicare funding and Medicare costs will reduce the scope and quality of medical care provided. There is no other way.

The Republican budget does little to contain rising medical costs. Instead, it simply cuts the amount of Federal Government will have to pay to cover these costs. By ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries will have fewer benefits, the Republicans will undo much of what Medicare has accomplished over the past 30 years. These accomplishments are astounding, and include:

(A) Dropping the poverty rate among seniors from 30 percent to just 12 percent;

(B) Increasing the rate of health care coverage for seniors from 50 percent to 97 percent;

(C) Extending health care coverage to seniors most in need as evidenced by the fact that 83 percent of Medicare recipients earn less than $25,000;

(D) Increasing access to health care for minorities by ending the pre-Medicare practice of certain hospitals and nursing homes of denying treatment to minorities;

(E) Reducing the rate of heart- and stroke-related deaths by 40 percent and 63 percent, respectively, between 1960 and 1991; and

(F) Extending life expectancies for women who live to 65 from 16 to 19 years and for men who live to 65 from 13 years to 16 years since 1965.

Republicans argue that they are saving—not dismantling—Medicare. They say Medicare spending must be reduced drastically. They cite the recent Medicare trustees report which indicates that the Medicare trust fund may be broke in 2002. What the Republicans don't say is that every Medicare trustees report has predicted the trust fund's impending insolvency. The 1970 report predicted insolvency in 1972, the 1972 report picked 1976, the 1982 report said 1987, an so on. Congress acted to avoid the impending insolvency following the release of those reports. And, each time Congress acted, it did not have to cut back on Medicare benefits to the elderly. Furthermore, the recent trustees report advises that the financial standing of the Medicare trust fund could cover a wider span of years. In other words, the trustees report states that the trust fund could become insolvent in 2002—in 7 years—or in the year 2006—in 11 years—or 2009—in 14 years. Given that the recent Medicare trustees report predicts trust fund's insolvency in different years and the fact that the dire consequences of insolvency predicted in earlier trustees report have not occurred, I believe the Republican use of the recent Medicare trustees report is both exploitative and unjustified. The report has been used by Republicans who had to find some way to pay for their tax cuts that will, in large part, benefit mainly the Nation's top 1 percent of income earners. There is little doubt that the Republicans are slashing Medicare spending by $270 billion solely to pay for their $245 billion tax cut. If the Republicans' objective was to improve Medicare's financial condition, they would be proposing much smaller Medicare spending reductions, and recommending instead cost containment proposals.

I respectfully submit that if the Republicans are truly serious about saving Medicare, their budget plan would seek to contain rising medical medical costs rather than just hold down what the Federal Government will pay for such costs. The proposed Republican Medicare spending reductions of $270 billion is difficult to comprehend and impossible to justify.

The American public must not be fooled into thinking that these cuts are necessary to save Medicare from insolvency. These monstrous cuts are solely to pay for the Republican tax cuts.

It must not be allowed to happen.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SECRETARY OF ENERGY'S TRAVEL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio [Mr. HOKE] is recognized for 5 minutes.