Medicaid program which primarily pays for nursing home care in this country and they are eliminating all nursing home standards. Basically unless the State steps in, the nursing homes can do whatever they want.

The other thing they did was to eliminate any protection for seniors, the spouse who stays back at home when the other spouse goes to a nursing home. Right now if your spouse has to go to a nursing home and pay for it by Medicaid, you can keep your home, you can keep your car, you can keep something like $14,000 in assets. That is gone.

The assault on senior citizens both with the changes in Medicare and Medicaid continues. It is very unfortunate. I think it is incumbent upon us to continue to speak out against it.

REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP ON MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SALMON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. FOX] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FOX of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise to underscore the importance of the Republican leadership in being at the forefront to help senior citizens here in the United States.

We have looked to the leadership of this House, the Republicans, who in a bipartisan fashion this year rolled back the unfair tax that is on our Social Security recipients that was placed there in 1993. As well, under that same leadership, in a bipartisan vote but led by Republicans, the seniors, who have been capped at $11,280 for income for those under 70 without having deductions from their Social Security allotment, in fact now can earn under our new legislation up to $30,000 a year without any deductions from Social Security payments.

This is what many senior groups have asked for and we have responded by in fact approving such legislation in this House.

Now let us look to the major problem that we need to face to make sure that Medicare is in fact here not only for the seniors of today but for the seniors of tomorrow. We look to the fact that Republicans and Democrats in the House are looking to preserve, protect and hopefully strengthen Medicare.

Just look to the President's trustees, Mr. Speaker, back here in the spring of the year, when they determined, and that is the Secretary of Treasury Rubin, Secretary of Health Shalala and the Secretary of Labor Reich, they all said that by the year 2002 if we do nothing, Medicare goes bankrupt. No representative in this House or in the Senate could responsibly go home after this session and say we did nothing to preserve, protect or strengthen Medicare.

Therefore, we need to look to alternatives of what to do. How do we strengthen this system that has provided valuable health care services to our seniors the last 30 years?

We look at health care costs in the country today, Mr. Speaker. Four percent is the average health care cost increase that we are having. But Medicare has gone up 10 or 11 percent a year. If you just look to the fact that fraud, abuse and waste is taking $30 billion a year, that has been documented by every important Government agency, including the GAO, you will find that that is a large part of how we can solve the Medicare crisis.

I had a Medicare preservation task force meet throughout my district this summer, a bipartisan group, asked seniors, those who are subscribers, insurance companies, they talked to people who are involved in the health care field and said, ''What can we do to change it?'' They came up with some solutions which I have passed on to legislative leaders of the House and we hope that as a result of those task force recommendations, Mr. Speaker, we will have some fundamental changes.

One of the changes they want to see is first, of course, the fraud, abuse, and waste eliminated but also the 12-percent cost we put toward paperwork—paperwork, Mr. Speaker—instead of health care. We have to reduce that. We also had from our task force recommendations that beyond having the fee-for-service as an option for our seniors, the continued fee-for-service, also talking about the possibility of a managed care option, with more services to seniors that they are not now getting, possibly dentures or eye care or pharmaceuticals included. Also talking about Medisave accounts, where you get $4,800 a year as you do now, of course, up to $6,700 by the year 2002, but whatever funds you would not use in your visits to the doctor, et cetera, will be rolled over, you keep the money or rolled over to the following year. Also our task force called for the Inspector General to actually implement some of the reforms from the HHS Inspector General which call for not paying those subscribers, not paying those who provide the health care service substandard care, that we make sure we get reimbursement to the system.

I am also working with the gentleman from New Mexico [Mr. SCHIFF] and the gentleman from Connecticut [Mr. SHAYS] on legislation to speed up the enforcement, investigation and prosecution of those who would commit the fraud, abuse and waste.

I think that we can see, Mr. Speaker, that by working together in a bipartisan fashion, we can not only make sure that we have a health care system under Medicare for our seniors that is strong and is preserved for this generation of seniors but for the next generation of seniors to whom we also owe a responsibility.

REPUBLICANS WILL GET MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida [Ms. BROWN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the 104th Congress came here with a mission: to balance the budget. I don't think there are many who would disagree that balancing the budget is a top priority. But I cannot, in good faith, balance the budget on the backs of the poor women, children, the elderly, and the disabled—people who need help the most. It is wrong for this Congress to abandon Americans in need.

Mr. Speaker, Webster's Dictionary defines the verb to ''cut'' as to hit sharply, to constrict, to reduce, to lessen, to hurt.

I understand that the Republican leadership is unhappy about us using the word ''cut'' to describe the Republicans' revolting and offensive Medicare plan. OK, fine, Maybe cut is not quite the right word. Well how about g-u-t? According to Webster's, to gut is to demolish, to destroy. How do you like the word gut? The fact is that Republicans want to destroy Medicare's security and leave our seniors stranded to fend for themselves. Perhaps gut is a more appropriate word!

Mr. Speaker, during the August recess, I held 13 town meetings and met with 3,000 of my constituents. My constituents told me that they are outraged about the Republicans' reverse Robin Hood tactics—taking Medicare benefits from seniors in order to pay for a tax break for the wealthy.

The Republicans are trying to pull the wool over the eyes of 37 million of our Nation's seniors. Many of these folks will be forced to give up their doctors, premiums will rise, as will deductibles and copayments. For many of our Nation's low-income seniors, these cuts will be devastating. A thousand dollars extra per year is not small change.

Republican call it a cut in the growth of spending. I call a sneaky attempt to fool seniors. They say they are offering seniors choices. The truth is that seniors will pay more and get less. They call it progress. I call it a good old-fashioned bait and switch.

You know, the Republican Medicare plan reminds me of an old saying: you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time. The American people will not be fooled by this game being played with the health care of the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, we are sent here to Congress to be a protector of the people. Thirty years ago, when President Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare into law, Congress made a social contract with the seniors of our Nation. Well, guess who opposed Medicare in 1965? The Republicans. Even before that, during the Eisenhower and Truman administrations, the Republicans opposed passing Medicare. That's why it's no surprise