the extraordinary success and impact this program has had on our country.

Any changes that are made hastily will be devastating to the program and to the seniors that depend on Medicare. Although this program is in need of reform, it must not be done without debate and discussion and it must not be done by taking away health care from seniors who depend on it for their survival.

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

[Mr. WISE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

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

[Mrs. MALONEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

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

[Mr. GENE GREEN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE MUST BE ALLOWED TO PERFORM ITS WORK

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

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, yesterday a very alarming happening occurred in the House Agriculture Committee. For the first time in recollection, the leadership of this House took away the prerogative of the Agriculture Committee for doing its work, in this case on a reconciliation bill. It was not that the Agriculture Committee was not trying to do its work, and I take great exception to a statement that was made by the chairman that says, ''This situation, which has caused the differences of opinion, has been made more difficult because our Democratic colleagues have opted for a destructive role in the process.'' I do not see how anyone could make that statement with a clear conscience.

Mr. Speaker, we had a Democratic alternative, we have a Democratic alternative, and we will fight for that alternative, and that alternative for the budget reconciliation process says that basically we think $400 billion in cuts from Medicare and Medicaid are excessive, that the additional cuts in education being proposed are excessive, and that the $13.4 billion in cuts from agricultural programs are excessive when they are used for purposes of granting a tax cut. We will show on this floor that there is an alternative and we hope that there will be 21 votes for that alternative.

However, yesterday the leadership of this body decided that unless the Agriculture Committee reports a politically correct solution, we do not want to see it. That is disturbing.

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No witnesses have ever been called on the Freedom to Farm Act. I am the ranking member of the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities. I was never informed that there were ever considered to be hearings on the Freedom to Farm Act. The only time we heard about it is when it came from the leadership of this body in suggesting that that is the way we ought to go to the reconciliation committee.

We have a Democratic alternative. It was voted on in the Ag Committee and it was voted down predictably because we do not have the votes and I understand that. But I think it stretches the point when we say when there were 2 Republicans who offered an alternative and some of us who even disagreed with the 13.4, the majority of Democrats voted for a bipartisan substitute, but we were unable to get votes from the Republicans for that. It stretches the imagination and it stretches the truth when we read and we hear what is going on.

It bothers me greatly when the leadership of this House suggests to the Committee on Agriculture that unless you do our will, our bidding, we may even consider eliminating the Committee on Agriculture, and put it in writing.

Now, I do not know what is going on, but as a Member of this body who has traditionally participated in bipartisan action, who shares the frustration of the American people that we are constantly fighting Democrats and Republicans, I do not know what is happening in this body now when the hand of bipartisanship is not being offered, in fact it is being cut off regularly.

When we look at what happened yesterday in the Committee on Agriculture, it is a very disturbing trend. I hope that as we proceed now to the budget reconciliation that the general public will begin to understand there are alternatives out there, there are ways to balance the budget by the year 2002, and it does not require gutting rural America, health care, it does not require an absolute total change in philosophy of farm programs.

Let us never forget for a moment, are we not all blessed to live in a country that has the most abundant food supply, the best quality of food, the safest food supply at the lowest cost of any other country in the world, warts and all? All of the criticism we are hearing from the editorial boards that agree with the Freedom to Farm Act because they want to eliminate farm policy, should we the American people not stop for just a moment and say, maybe just maybe American agriculture is doing a few things right? And not have to follow blindly a philosophical leadership of this House that does not have a clue about farm policy and agriculture but has a great philosophical belief that somehow, someway by eliminating farm programs we are going to do better?

It is not a budget question, it is a philosophical question. The sooner we start debating these things on this floor and in the Committee on Agriculture and not getting mad and taking our bat and going home, the sooner we will get on with the kind of policies required for this country to see that we continue to have this abundant food supply.

REPUBLICANS PROPOSE CUT IN MEDICARE PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BUNN of Oregon). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Alabama [Mr. HILLIARD] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HILLIARD. Mr. Speaker, the general public is outraged at the Republicans' scheme to destroy Medicare, especially since it is common knowledge that the Republican proposal is cutting $270 billion from Medicare just to give wealthy persons a tax cut.

The new and fresh Republicans are supposed to represent the people, not the Republican Party. Several recent polls indicate that the American public is highly skeptical of Republican efforts to cut Medicare.

Let us listen to what the American people are saying as set out by a series of independent polls that have recently been taken. Seventy-one percent of Americans have very little or no trust at all in House Republicans to handle the Medicare financing problems. This was a poll taken by the Associated Press.

Sixty-eight percent of Americans place no trust in the Republicans on the issue of Medicare. This is by a Time/CNN poll.

Fifty-three percent of Americans oppose the Republican plan to offer vouchers to seniors as a way of reducing costs. This is an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll.

Only 19 percent of Americans offered support for a Republican plan to make large cuts in Medicare. Yes, this is by Time/CNN. CNN, right in the heart of the South.

Seventy-five percent of Americans oppose cutting Medicare to pay for tax breaks. Once again, NBC/Wall Street Journal.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, 76 percent of Americans believe it is more important to maintain Medicare as it is than reducing the budget deficit. That needs to be repeated; 76 percent. That is from CBS.

All of these polls are independent in nature. None of them have anything to do with the Republican or with the Democratic Party.