the Committee on Ways and Means. They simply turned a deaf ear not just to us, maybe we do not matter much, but turned a deaf ear to the American people, the people that wanted to come in and talk about what this Medicare bill was really about.

So while there were back-room deals, the American Medical Association and other groups got into the back room with the Republican leadership, the elderly were not even allowed in the hearing rooms to testify on this bill.

One lady in the Committee on Commerce a couple of weeks ago came in, tried to testify, was gaveled down. Eventually, within a few minutes, 15 elderly people, some in wheelchairs, some with canes, all of them I believe over 70 years old, were arrested and hustled out of the committee room, taken down into the basement. Several of them were handcuffed. All of them were taken to the police station in paddy wagons and fingerprinted and mug-shotted. It was a pretty amazing spectacle.

Then today, almost as disturbing, the Speaker of the House stood on this floor and said something, and I am sure he did not knowingly do this, but said something that clearly was not true about a provision in the bill that the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. MARKEY] had talked about, a provision in the bill that has been removed from the Medicaid bill that allowed elderly widows, some 11 million in this country that literally had their Medicare premiums paid for because they were so poor that they could not pay for them, and particularly when they go from $46 to $90 or $100, whatever the Gingrich Medicare bill ends up raising them to, that money was taken away from them.

The Speaker may have been confused or it may have been bad staff work. It may have simply been all the late-night deals that were cut as the bill was changed as late as last night in the middle of the night, and he was simply confused.

I have only been here 3 years, but there is this new arrogance to this place that I have never seen and heard of before, but it is particularly disturbing when those kinds of things are said on the floor because of either confusion or bad staff work, but the process has been so closed that people have not had a chance to really learn about what is in this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my friend, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE].

Mr. PALLONE. I appreciate the gentleman yielding.

Mr. Speaker, there was obviously confusion in the Speaker's mind, but there really should be no confusion about this issue. Because, as the gentleman knows, I offered this amendment in our Committee on Commerce to make sure that in Medicaid these qualified Medicare beneficiaries were going to have their part B premiums covered.

The gentleman from Illinois [Mr. RUSH] offered the same amendment on the Medicare bill in the Committee on Commerce, the bad bill that we considered today; and I went before the Committee on Rules yesterday and asked that the amendment be considered as part of the bill today, had a dialogue with the members of the Committee on Rules, including the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. LINDER] who was there, and explained that we wanted to make sure that there was a guarantee in the Medicare bill for these widows and these low-income senior citizens for which the Federal Government now pays their part B premium.

It is true, it may very well be that the Speaker misunderstood, but there is no excuse for it. Because in fact on three different occasions we have asked for this to be considered, on two occasions in this bill. The Committee on Rules denied the opportunity to have that amendment considered. The bill that we had today did not have the guarantee that those Part B premiums for those low-income seniors would be paid.

I think what the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. MARKEY] said is absolutely correct. We should go back to the Committee on Rules next week, ask that it be considered again in concert with the Medicaid bill. But I am really outraged over the fact that the suggestion was made today that somehow this guarantee was in the bill. It is not in the bill; it is not in the Medicaid bill; and we, all of us collectively, have tried very hard to make sure the guarantee was there and it is not there.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. None of this would have happened, I think, if we had had hearings. There were dozens of hearings on Waco and Randy Weaver and Whitewater but no hearings on Medicare and Medicaid which affect everybody in this country.

I think the Speaker misspoke and was probably confused but sort of attacked our friend from Massachusetts by name. Surely if we had had hearings and not had these late-night deals and really, as a country, really discussed Medicare, Medicaid and what it means to senior citizens, you do not cut $270 billion to give tax breaks to the rich.

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

[Mr. MCINNIS 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 Connecticut [Ms. DELAURO] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Ms. DELAURO addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

H.R. 2259

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

Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma. Mr. Speaker, as the son of a policeman and a fervent supporter of strong anticrime measures, I believe that we must attack the root problems that cause crime in America and that we must punish equal crimes with equal justice regardless of a person's color or economic class.

Last night we considered a well-intentioned bill, H.R. 2259, that sought to address one part of the Nation's crime problem, but unfortunately, it missed the mark by a mile and sent the wrong message to the Nation's drug traffickers and drug abusers.

The U.S. Sentencing Commission recently recommended that sentences for possessing and trafficking in crack cocaine should be the same as for possessing and trafficking in powder cocaine.

The Commission is right to seek to equalize punishment. It is essentially unjust to have one standard of justice for the type of cocaine that is abused in the expensive homes of our finest suburbs and a different standard of justice for the type of cocaine that is abused in the abandoned crack houses of our worst ghettos.

The Commission should have sought equalization by raising the sentences for powder cocaine. My view is that higher sentences, at equal levels, are needed in these cases.

Unfortunately, procedural rules did not allow that vote, so I voted to recommit H.R. 2259 with that goal in mind. When that failed, I had no choice but to vote against final passage.

We must punish the drug possessor, and work to rehabilitate him. But we must imprison the drug distributor and throw away the key. He haunts our Nation's schoolyards and makes his fortune off his poverty stricken and addicted buyer. He condemns his victims to a life of poverty and an early death. And his victims are disproportionately inner-city kids—young black Americans.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], black Americans are being disproportionately affected by sentencing disparities. Only 4 percent of those sentenced for violating crack laws are white although 51 percent of crack users are white. In contrast, 88 percent of those sentenced for crack violations are black Americans, while only 38 percent of crack users are black, according to the HHS study.

I have said numerous times that this country's laws must deal with racial discrimination in as aggressive a manner as possible. I believe that implicit in that philosophy is a mandate to change any law that results in de factor racial discrimination.

As the father of young children, I am committed to passing the strongest