

three-fifths super majority in both the House and the Senate. This super majority would be too high a hurdle for frivolous, spur-of-the-moment impulse spending. Congress would only be able to spend more than income warrants during times of real need like national emergencies and war.

The Balanced Budget Amendment would also help us accomplish one of my top priorities for the 106th Congress, preserving and protecting Social Security for future generations. Right now the federal government "borrows" from the Social Security surplus in order to pay for other numerous federal programs such as education, Medicare, and transportation. Even by conservative estimates, without an end to this "borrowing," we can count on Social Security running deficits by 2012, and headed toward bankruptcy in the early 2020's.

With a permanently balanced budget, the federal government will be forced to prioritize money for these programs and others important to Coloradans. By reducing the amount we borrow to meet today's federal debt obligation, we pay less interest on the national debt each year.

Even with all of these incentives to pass the Balanced Budget Amendment, it won't be easy. There are still too many big spenders in Washington who are adept at creating new expensive programs for every problem. Under the Balanced Budget Amendment, liberals won't be able to continue their free spending ways without considering the long-term consequences to Colorado families like Delmar's.

It's time to stop runaway government spending. Coloradans balanced their checkbooks every day, knowing they can't spend money they don't have. I don't think there's any reason to expect less of the federal government.

By passing the Balanced Budget Amendment, Delmar will be assured bureaucrats in Washington will have to worry about making ends meet just like he does.

THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

HON. PAUL RYAN

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 9, 1999

Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, three years ago, the President signed into law the Telecommunications Act of 1996. I was not a member of Congress then. But I had been, I would have supported the goals of the act to create an environment where new technologies, consumer choices and jobs would flourish.

Today, I am frankly disappointed that those goals have largely not been met. There is local phone competition because local phone companies have opened their markets. However, due to the manner in which the FCC has implemented the act, new local competitors are "cream skimming" and are providing service to predominantly businesses, not residential customers. Due to the FCC's implementation of the act, local phone companies are still tangled in a thicket of FCC regulations and are unable to provide consumers with more choices in long distance service. And advanced telecommunications services, which provide American households benefits includ-

ing fast internet access, are not reaching millions of consumers. In fact, in one region of the country (which has sadly become known as the "No High Speed Internet Access Zone"), not a single citizen has high-speed internet access.

Mr. Speaker, the act is not the problem, the FCC's implementation is. The Federal Communications Commission has disregarded the intent of Congress, and in my view, consumers are suffering. It's time to designate, and let the marketplace do its job.

INTRODUCTION OF THE MEDIGAP ACCESS PROTECTION FOR SENIORS ACT OF 1999

HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 9, 1999

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation that will restore to thousands of our nation's seniors access to an essential element of comprehensive medical care—prescription drugs.

Prescription drugs are the single largest out-of-pocket medical expense for the elderly, and for many the greatest cause for worry. To secure prescription drug coverage, as well as other benefits not part of the basic Medicare package, many seniors have chosen to join HMOs during the past few years.

But October 2, 1998 signaled a turning point for them. You may recall that was the deadline for HMOs to notify the Health Care Financing Administration whether they would continue to participate in Medicare+Choice in 1999. Well, more than 100 plans nationwide decided to either end their participation with Medicare entirely, or to cut back their service areas. As a result, 440,000 Medicare HMO enrollees in 22 states were abandoned by their Medicare HMO.

More than 300,000 Medicare beneficiaries had a prescription drug benefit and lost it on December 31st. More than 70,000 beneficiaries were left with no Medicare HMO option whatsoever. Not only has the number of plans offering the drug benefit shrunk considerably from last year, it is expected to be even lower when HMOs submit their proposals to HCFA for next year.

Although Congress' stated goal in the Balanced Budget Act was to provide more choices to seniors, it seems that the reverse has happened. BBA did provide some security for seniors whose Medicare HMOs abandon them—they are guaranteed the ability to enroll in four of the ten standardized Medigap plans: A, B, C, or F. But none of those plans offers any prescription drug coverage. They can apply for one of the plans that offers it: H, I, or J, but insurance companies can refuse to enroll them, place pre-existing conditions on those policies, or discriminate in pricing because of the patient's health status, effectively denying them access.

In the closing days of the 105th Congress, I introduced the Medigap Access Protection for Seniors Act. This bill helps beneficiaries maintain their outpatient drug coverage when they are dropped from a Medicare HMO that provided that benefit, by guaranteeing them enrollment in plans supplemental plan H, I, or J.

Today, I am reintroducing this legislation. Seniors across the nation placed their trust in Congress when they selected a Medicare HMO. They did so because of the promise of additional benefits, little or no additional premium costs, and with the belief that these plans would remain accessible to them. In doing so, many gave up their supplemental policies. Now, they can only return to the most limited of Medigap plans, ones with no coverage for prescription drugs.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling upon my colleagues to join me in taking this important step to restore prescription drug benefits for thousands of beneficiaries and I am calling upon this Congress to pass this bill early in the first session and renew seniors' faith in the promise of Medicare.

TRIBUTE TO PATRICIA GRIFFITH

HON. RON KLINK

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 9, 1999

Mr. KLINK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an extraordinary journalist, Patricia Griffith, Washington Bureau Chief for the Toledo Blade and the Pittsburgh Post Gazette for the past 10 years. On Friday, February 12, 1999, Pat will retire after more than 35 years of covering national politics. A native of San Francisco, Pat first came to Washington to serve as press secretary to Mrs. Hubert Humphrey in the Johnson-Humphrey presidential campaign of 1964.

In addition to the Toledo Blade and the Post Gazette, Pat has also worked for the Herald of Monterey, CA, Washington Post and the San Francisco Examiner. Her reporting has given millions of readers insight into the policy and politics that affect their daily lives. Indeed, Pittsburgh has been honored to have a journalist as reliable and distinguished as Pat. I have always admired her as a reporter and respected her as a person for her commitment to impartial news writing and her pleasant demeanor sometimes in the face of seemingly impossible deadlines.

On behalf of the readership of the Toledo Blade and the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, I thank you for your service. You are a journalist of the highest caliber and integrity. Your reporting has always been fair, unbiased and informative and I join your friends and colleagues in wishing you continued success. I wish you good health and best of luck in your retirement and extend to you my heartfelt thanks and congratulations. And so it is with great pleasure that I ask my colleagues to join me in paying tribute to this most dedicated individual.

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE SUPREME COURT DECISION, ROE V. WADE

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 9, 1999

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, Friday January 22nd 1999 marked the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in Roe v.