

the lack of public participation in reviewing financial arrangements. And once the crisis degenerated into recession, "the protective power of democracy" was simply not available to ensure spreading the burden of a cruel economic contraction.

Such a protective power, Sen argues, is of particular importance for the poor, for potential famine victims, for the destitute thrown off the economic ladder in a financial earthquake: "People in economic need also need a political voice." With evident pride he notes that in the mid-1970s, the Indian electorate—"one of the poorest of the world"—affirmed its democratic disposition by voting out a government that had proclaimed emergency rule and abridged the people's rights.

As for cultural differences, a common claim is that Asians traditionally value discipline over political freedom. Sen finds that hard to accept. He is in a position, as few of us are, to range over the texts of diverse Asian cultures and to contend with assorted practitioners and scholars in the field.

His conclusion: "The monolithic interpretation of Asian values as hostile to democracy and political rights does not bear critical scrutiny." Such an interpretation comes from politicians, not scholars: "to dismiss the plausibility of democracy as a universal value on the ground of the presence of some Asian writings on discipline and order would be similar to rejecting the plausibility of democracy . . . on the basis of the writings of Aquinas or Plato."

The many merits of democracy, Sen concludes, "are not regional in character. Nor is the advocacy of discipline or order in contrast with freedom and democracy. Heterogeneity of values seems to characterize most, perhaps all, major cultures. The cultural argument does not foreclose, nor indeed deeply constrain, the choices we can make today."

It was a felicitous stroke for the National Endowment for Democracy to recruit Amartya Sen as the herald of its attempt to put achieved and aspiring democrats in closer touch with one another. The Internet makes the mechanics of it easy. The wisdom of the man illuminates the core idea: Democracy is universal.

IMPROVING MEDICARE QUALITY THROUGH PURCHASING: THE OHIO EXPERIENCE

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 1999

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, three weeks ago, I introduced H.R. 1392, the "Centers of Excellence" bill. H.R. 1392 would allow Medicare to provide incentives for beneficiaries to use certain high-volume, high-quality facilities. This initiative would both save lives, and save money for Medicare.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that facilities that perform large numbers of complex procedures have lower mortality rates and fewer adverse outcomes. These facilities, known as "Centers of Excellence," have become an important private sector tool for quality improvement and cost containment.

An April 22 article in the Wall Street Journal highlighted an Ohio HMO with a Centers of Excellence program for heart procedures. After automatically removing facilities that performed fewer than 250 heart procedures per year from their list of preferred providers, the HMO conducted an extensive quality survey to

determine the rating of the remaining facilities. This resulted in several more facilities being removed from the list, including some very reputable hospitals in the area. The Ohio experience showed that facilities with the best reputations for excellence did not necessarily have the best outcomes.

Being removed from the Ohio HMO's preferred provider list was a strong competitive incentive for lower-quality facilities to improve their procedures. For one facility, the rate of heart attack following bypass surgery dropped from 2.8 percent in 1993 to 0.9 percent in 1997. A national "Centers of Excellence" program would likely have the same result, spurring facilities with a lower quality rating to improve their services and raising quality standards overall.

Not only will H.R. 1392 improve quality, it will also lower costs for Medicare. Fewer complications after surgery mean less follow up care and fewer medical expenses. Targeting patient volume to certain facilities can also result in discounted prices.

Although "Centers of Excellence" passed the House in 1997, political motivations have kept it from becoming law. Quality health care should not be a pawn in the political chess game. We have a second chance to implement this important change for Medicare. I strongly urge my colleagues' support for H.R. 1392.

CAN PARENTS UTTER HARDEST WORD OF ALL?

HON. ROB PORTMAN

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 1999

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, the recent shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, CO, have shocked the entire Nation.

As a legislator and as a parent of three young children, I am concerned about the overall environment in which today's kids are being raised. Today's fast-paced world of the Internet, video games, and increasingly violent pop culture bears little resemblance to the America in which so many parents from my generation were raised. The increase of the incidences and ferocity of school violence are a cause for deep concern—and a call to action.

During the coming weeks and months, here in the Halls of Congress—and in school board meeting rooms, city council chambers, and in state legislatures around the country—our Nation will discuss what we can do to prevent another tragedy like Littleton. Some of the ideas we will discuss will be helpful and should be adopted. Other proposals will make us feel as though we're doing something, but will do nothing to prevent the root causes of school violence.

Throughout this national dialog, I hope we do not overlook the one obvious and essential ingredient to preventing these senseless acts of violence. There is nothing more powerful than an active, concerned, and caring parent. I've seen it personally in my work on the problem of reducing teenage substance abuse and have read it in countless studies on reshaping adolescent behavior.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to enter a thoughtful and insightful piece by author and col-

umnist Laura Pulfer from yesterday's Cincinnati Enquirer into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD which addresses the urgent need for new parenting.

[From the Cincinnati Enquirer, May 4, 1999]
CAN PARENTS UTTER HARDEST WORD OF ALL?

(By Laura Pulfer)

Some hard things must be said if we are to be honest about this thing that happened in Littleton. If we are to learn anything, if we are to let it be important.

The first thing is that the young men who killed the children at the high school do not belong among the victims' names—even if the in-crowd made their lives a living hell. At the memorial site near Columbine High School, an Illinois carpenter erected a set of 8-foot-high wooden crosses, 15 of them, including two memorializing the killers.

FEELING GUILTY?

An angry father of one of the victims took down the crosses for Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, saying it wasn't appropriate to honor the shooters in the same spot. Well, of course not. What the killers did at this high school is monstrous. We might forgive them, but we will not award them martyrdom.

And however, nervous—however guilty—we suburban people of means are prepared to be about our skills as parents, about our two-paycheck homes, we can say so aloud. Monstrous. The murderers took guns of incredible destruction—weapons built to perform exactly as they did—and moved from classmate to classmate, blowing them away, surely with bits of bone and brain and blood clinging to their celebrated black trench coats.

This is something evil. And we need to say so. This is not the time to be our famously flexible selves with our flexible time, flexible mortgages, flexible morals.

Right and wrong. Good and bad. Yes and no.

We can say these words, especially to our children. In fact, it is our duty. There is a reason human offspring are sent home from the hospital with a couple of parents instead of a Visa card and the keys to an apartment. They are unformed. And uninformed. We're supposed to fill them in.

KEEPING TABS

They don't need us to be their buddies. They have younger, cooler people willing to do that. They need snooty, pushy, loving, know-it-all parents.

A study presented Monday to the Pediatric Academic Societies convention reports that children of parents who keep close tabs on them are less likely to get in trouble. Do you suspect our parents already knew this? You know, the generation who set curfews, made us work for our spending money, made us answer a lot of annoying questions before they would allow us out of the house, nagged us about our hair and clothes.

Dr. Susan Feigelman, a University of Maryland researcher who led the study, advised parents to check up on their children's friends. This is a shocking notion for many enlightened former flower children.

Researchers surveyed children ages 9-15 over a four-year period. The group was asked whether their parents knew where they were after school, whether they were expected to call and say where they were going and with whom, whether their parents knew where they were at night.

Children monitored by their parents were less likely to sell drugs or use them. They were less likely to drink alcohol or have unprotected sex. Dr. Feigelman said the study showed that peer groups became more influential as children get older.

Probably peer groups and everything else. So it only makes sense for parents to monitor that, too. That's not repressive. That's not illegal. That is our job.