That whole mess was started by a businessman who believed the state and federal conservation agencies were conspiring to destroy the county when acting to protect the environment. He wrote a letter to the county commissioners calling for a grand jury because the conservation agencies, especially the Nevada Division of Wildlife and the U.S. Forest Service, and environmental groups were ruining almost everything held dear by the people of that area. Those suffering economically, according to the writer, were the ranching, mining, and business communities and all of the taxpayers.

The grand jury was called and it acted as wild as the charges made in the letter. While all of this was going on, the U.S. Forest Service sat on its hands and took no action to replace a road damaged by a flood in 1995. This resulted in the county going to fix the road running alongside the West Fork of the Jarbidge River. Immediately another federal agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, came unglued because it said the roadwork was hurting the bull trout habitat. Eventually this mess was calmed down and on the surface appears straightened out because the state also had a role to play.

So now everything is hunky-dory between the federal conservation agencies and Elko County? Not really. There's the small issue over cemetery land at Jarbidge. Yes, a very small two acres that Rep. Jim Gibbons wants turned over to the county. Here are Gibbon's words before a subcommittee in Washington last week:

''As you may know Jarbidge is a small, rural community in Elko County, Nevada. Known historically for its contribution to Nevada's mining industry, this community is surrounded by national forest lands and the Jarbidge Wilderness Area.

''Within this area is a small cemetery, under administration of the Forest Service, where generations of residents of this historic community have been laid to rest.

''The earliest tombstones are dated in the very early 1900s, and some members of the Jarbidge community claim that this land has been used as a cemetery long before its designation as Forest Service land.

''Since 1915 the Jarbidge Cemetery has been operated under a permit to Elko County by a Special Use authorization which runs periodically for 10 and occasionally 20 years.

''In an effort to remove the uncertainty about the continued existence of this cemetery and to resolve the operational responsibility, the residents of Jarbidge have long expressed an interest in having two acres, containing the cemetery, conveyed to the county so they might have a permanent, private cemetery.

''Madame Chairman, that is why I have introduced HR 1231, a bill that would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to convey approximately two acres of National Forest lands to Elko County, Nevada, or continued use as a cemetery.''

No problem for this small request coming from a state with thousands of square miles controlled by the federal government. Guess again. USFS Deputy Chief Ron Stewart testified against HR 1231 because his agency expects to be paid fair market price of those two acres. His testimony doesn't describe how you put a price on a cemetery that's just a bit less than 100 years old. What it does reveal is a petty attitude by a large federal agency that continues to result in even its rational decisions being questioned by the people in and around little Jarbidge.

Gibbons could hardly believe Forest Service officials were making the demand but it they were, he added, they ''should hang their heads. These people are asking for a cemetery, not for land to build commercial or residential enterprises. . . . ''

Because of the actions of Elko's runaway grand jury I began to wonder what was in the water the jurors were drinking. This most recent action by the Forest Service in Washington has convinced me that its decision makers are drinking straight from the polluted Potomac River.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LIPINSKI) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. LIPINSKI 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 Hawaii (Mrs. MINK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MINK of Hawaii 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 gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MORELLA 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 Washington (Mr. BAIRD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BAIRD addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

□ 1530

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. STEARNS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina 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 gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PETERSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE PRESIDENT'S PLAN TO MODERNIZE AND STRENGTHEN MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to start this afternoon by talking about the President's plan to modernize and strengthen Medicare for the next century which he announced at a press conference that was held at the White House yesterday; and let me say, Mr. Speaker, if I can, that I strongly welcome this proposal. I think it is a very good proposal and specifically with regard to the new prescription drug benefit, the effort to eliminate copayments and deductibles for preventive care, the fact that it also includes the Medicare buy-in for the near elderly, those who just are below the age of 65, and the fact that by using 15 percent of the projected surplus that Medicare is fully funded for a much longer period of time than would be the case under current conditions. All these things I think are a strong indication that this is a very good proposal which certainly the Democrats support and which I am hopeful that the Republicans and the Republican leadership will support as well so that we can get a bill out of committee to the floor and passed in this Congress.

Let me just talk a little bit about some of the most important aspects of this Medicare proposal in my opinion. I think probably the most important aspect is the new voluntary Medicare Part B prescription drug benefit that is affordable and is available to all beneficiaries.

We all know that when you talk about Medicare the biggest gap, if you will, that exists in the Medicare program now is the lack of a prescription drug benefit. When Medicare was started under President Johnson as a Democratic initiative back in the 1960s, over 30 years ago now, prescription drugs were not that much a part of the average senior citizen's budget. Medicine then was not so much emphasizing preventive care, particularly prescription drugs; and, frankly, a lot of the prescriptions that we have now had not even been invented. So it was not an important issue. It was not included in the Medicare package at the time.

But as time went on over the last 30 years the lack of a prescription drug benefit has been a major gap causing senior citizens to expend a lot of money out of pocket, in some cases several thousand dollars a year. And so the President's response in trying to include a modest prescription drug benefit is commendable, it is fully paid for, and I think it will go far towards helping senior citizens and the disabled under Medicare to deal with this problem.

I just wanted, if I could, to outline some of the high points of this. There is no deductible. And, well, basically the way it applies is that you contribute initially $24 a month as the premium that you pay for this new Part B; and Medicare, once you participate, pays half of your drug costs from the first prescription filled each year up to