

that, he has been to me an asset for my career.

Ron, congratulations on your career. We will miss you, as the gentleman from Michigan has said, but in our hearts you will always be with us.

Mr. UPTON. Reclaiming my time, Mr. Speaker, I just want to note that there are a number of Members tonight that would have liked to have paid tribute. Because of the particular hour that it is, I just want to recognize them and recognize that their statements will appear. The gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BASS), the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. KOLBE), the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP), and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) all from the bottom of their hearts have nothing but good things to say about our friend, Ron Lasch.

We hope we see him, and we hope that he has some type of privilege so we see him in the weeks ahead, so we can pay our firmest respects for all of his hard work and great service to this country.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mrs. JOHNSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. JOHNSON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ON THE RETIREMENT OF RON LASCH

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

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Speaker, I have served now in the House for 6 years, and this is the first time I think I have appeared on the floor to give a special order. There are some Members who have a lot on their minds and give special orders all the time. About some, like myself, some people back in my district say I do not have much on my mind at all.

But I will tell the Members, tonight I do feel compelled to come to the floor and spend at least part of that 5 minutes talking about the same subject that was talked about by my colleagues, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. UPTON) and the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), and that is the retirement of Ron Lasch.

I came back stunned from our Fourth of July recess today to find out that Ron had gone into retirement. The House of Representatives, Mr. Speaker, is a little less rich today than it was before we went on recess.

□ 1830

When we first come here, it does not take us long to figure out who knows what is going on and who does not know what is going on. There are a lot of people they will tell us what is going on, but we find out rather quickly they do not. Ron Lasch was somebody who

could always count on, someone who had not only our interests, but the body's interest at heart when he gave us advice.

The C-SPAN cameras in this Chamber focus on the Members. And I think a lot of people that watch these proceedings know that we have as the oldest serving Members of the House, the dean of the House, the great gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL), but I found out something today about my friend Ron Lasch he had been here for 44 years if you totaled up his service back to the time of a page, and I think that that rivals the time of the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL) in the House.

Mr. Speaker, just a quick anecdote, if I could. A couple of week ago, I had the honor of chairing the proceedings on the Interior Appropriations bill. It was raucous. It was partisan; it was a bitter debate as the parties waged war over funding for the arts and funding for Indian education and all of the things that go into the Department of the Interior and related agencies.

And I got myself into a little bit of trouble, Mr. Speaker, during the course of that debate when I closed down a quorum call a little earlier than I probably should have. Some of my friends on the Democratic side of the aisle did not take that very well. They were not taking the debate too well, and they were not taking some of the reverses that occurred during the revotes on some issues very well.

At the end of about 20 hours of pre-siding over that bill, one of the first people that came from the back of the Chamber up to the Speaker's rostrum to tell me it was okay and everything was going to be fine, and I would still get my paycheck and be able to serve the next day was Ron Lasch, and that is exactly the kind of fellow he is, and I am going to miss him.

His counsel is invaluable. His knowledge is unsurpassed by almost any that come to work here, but more than that, his interest in us as people was what I will remember of his service here, at least the time that his service coincided with mine.

He would always take time to ask how my kids were. He always asked me what the weather was like back in Ohio. He always asked me, when I used to tend the garden, if the corn was knee high by the 4th of July back in Ohio because he had a passion for gardening as well.

So I know that today he has submitted his retirement and the official word is that he is not going to come back. And I hope he has a wonderful and fruitful retirement, but more than that, Mr. Speaker, I actually hope that he reconsiders that decision and he comes back and serves.

And I see my friend from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP) in the well and I would be happy to yield the balance of my time to him for whatever remarks he would like to make.

Mr. WAMP. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr.

LATOURETTE) very much for the time. And certainly I join my colleagues in grateful appreciation to Ron Lasch who is a dear friend of mine, and I hope we continue to be friends as long as we live and beyond because so oftentimes I think the American people understand those of us that are in public office and who we are, but they do not know who is behind the scenes making the process work.

Ron Lasch is a creature of this House, having spent most of his life on this floor fully understanding the operations of this House, as my gentleman friend said, always knowing what the schedule might be but much more importantly understanding the history and the civility and the importance of this institution and always sharing it with Members.

Ron Lasch was born on the 1st anniversary of Pearl Harbor, December the 7th, 1942, and spent almost his whole life serving the United States House of Representatives, serving the Members. He would offer his advice to us when we asked it, but he would never offer it without us asking him first, and he would offer not just advice that you might get from some people that had an axe to grind or an agenda but the honest perspective of what is best for the United States House of Representatives. And I would tell you he is a dear friend, and the information is invaluable.

And he served the Speaker of the House, through so many Speakers of the House on this floor so well. Ron is the kind of person who would not even want us to be here paying tribute to him. He is not the kind of person who announced his retirement and then waited some weeks so that there would be receptions and all the hoopla around his retirement. He served quietly and effectively, but I will tell you when the greatness of this House is written, it would be a shame if Ron Lasch's name were not permanently enshrined here in the United States House of Representatives, because he gave his life to this institution.

He cares as much about the House of Representatives as any man that I have ever known or probably any person that I ever will know and that, Ron Lasch, is why I love you so much and I appreciate your dedication and service to this great Nation. Civil government is worthwhile. Civil government is worth our time and our effort, and it was worth your life's investment, from the House of Representatives and a grateful Nation, thank you Ron Lasch for a career of public service to the greatest Nation in the history of the world.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I want to join my colleagues this evening in recognizing the outstanding career of Ron Lasch.

This institution has been enriched by Ron's presence and his depth of knowledge of the legislative process. He could really be called, "Mr. House," because he's the expert around here. And he really has earned and deserves another title: The Honorable Ron Lasch. He's

a man of great honor and integrity. We've been enriched just by knowing Ron. He's been a stalwart and a steady influence during some stormy times on the House floor.

Ron's leaving, for me personally, is overwhelming. I'm losing a great friend. He has always given me wise counsel. He's someone I could always count on to answer questions about the House schedule or floor procedure or some arcane legislative matter. In describing Ron, I'm reminded of that advertisement for one of the country's top brokerage firms: "When Ron Lasch speaks, everyone listens."

He's always been here and I can't imagine this place without him.

Ron, this is a sad day for this institution and for me personally. The pace of the legislative process and the peculiarities of the House floor can bring with them frustrating moments. You've made it a little more bearable around here, Ron.

I thank you for your untiring dedication to the House of Representatives, and I wish you godspeed as you leave and find a life outside Congress. We will miss you greatly.

HIGH PRICE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS PAID BY SENIOR CITIZENS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TAYLOR of North Carolina). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TURNER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CAMP).

RON LASCH

Mr. CAMP. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TURNER) for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor to join my colleagues in recognizing the long service of Ron Lasch. He has been a very good friend to many of us in this House, and not just to new Members. I have been here a number of years and he has been friends and a good advisor to all of us. I think it is his judgment and friendship that most of us admire and respect.

As we rush to the floor to cast votes, he was somebody that you could always go to and count on for the judgment on what was happening on the floor and the real fine points of debate. But he was also a very good friend, and he was someone who you could seek advice from and certainly as a new Member that is important, but it is important every day of the year around here.

He was also somebody who really new how to keep the confidence but was not afraid to tell you when you needed some guidance or direction, and I think it was his plain-spokenness, his directness, his loyalty, his friendship, his high intellect. I think those are things that really drew all of us to him.

He will be sorely missed. I hope, in the next few days, we will all get a chance to talk to him personally and tell him how much we appreciate this service to this institution, to this House of Representatives, and I know that many Members on the other side of the aisle would come and seek his advice as well.

I know he will be missed greatly by all of us, and I just wanted to go on the record and state what a good friend Ron Lasch has been to me and to many Members of this House. He will be missed tremendously, and we wish him all the best in his retirement. And this will be opening a new chapter in his life, and I think that would be very exciting for him after 42 years of service to this House, it certainly is well deserved. I want to join my colleagues in wishing him all the very best.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor tonight during this special order hour with my colleagues, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GREEN), the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) and other leading Democrats to talk about an issue that we have worked on for at least 2 years now, and that is the problem of the high price of prescription drugs being paid by our senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit as we begin tonight about what I believe to be the coming crisis in health care for our senior citizens.

Just last week, most of us were in our districts over the July 4th holiday, and we had the chance to talk to our constituents. I had numerous senior citizens coming up to me and talking about the letter they had received from their HMO, from their insurance company telling them that as of the 1st of January, their Medicare choice policy, their HMO Medicare plan was going to be discontinued by their insurance company.

In fact, in East Texas, we have almost 5,000 seniors who are receiving these notices from their insurance companies, companies like Aetna, NYL Care, Humana are sending out notices to these seniors saying you are canceled, no longer can you have our Medicare choice HMO coverage.

Most of these seniors signed up for this option under Medicare, because an HMO lured them to sign up with the promise of some prescription drug coverage under Medicare, and these seniors are going to be greatly disappointed and very upset come January 1 when they find out no longer do they have access to prescription drug coverage under their Medicare+Choice program.

A good example of this came in a letter I received just yesterday. One constituent whose wife's name is Roxanne was dropped from NYL Care. Here is what this constituent's letter said to me, he wrote, our rights are being violated by the insurance companies and the politicians who are on the side of the insurance companies. My wife, Roxanne, he wrote, will end up in a wheelchair and possibly not able to walk again if she's denied the drug she needs. How many more Roxannes are out there, he writes, how many more Roxannes will suffer so the insurance companies and the politicians can get rich?

Mr. Speaker, well, it is a hard lesson to learn. Unfortunately, our senior

citizens are learning the lesson and that is you just cannot trust the insurance companies and the HMOs. Our senior citizens are out there struggling trying to pay the costs of prescription drugs. They know the insurance companies are not taking care of them, and they know that the insurance companies simply want to make money, and they are not interested in what happens to them.

That is why over 5,000 seniors in my district are getting notices as we speak. When an insurance company decides to pull out of an area, a lot of people get hurt, a lot of people will be left without coverage all across this country come January 1.

Some of us here in this House on the Democratic side of the aisle do care about our senior citizens, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GREEN), the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) and others have been working for almost 2 years trying to do something about the high cost of prescription drugs.

The sad fact is we know what works, and it is not the insurance companies' HMO plans. Just 2 weeks ago on the floor of this House, the Republican leadership passed a plan purportedly to help senior citizens with their prescription drug costs. It was a plan that said to the big insurance companies, you all offer insurance plans, prescription drug plans to our senior citizens and we will subsidize the costs for those who are at 125 percent of the poverty level and below.

Mr. Speaker, well, for starters we all understand that the problem of high price of prescription drugs does not just fall on those who are below the poverty level, it really depends not only what your income is, it depends on how sick you are.

I have an aunt who is a medical income person. She just got a new prescription from her doctor for a heart ailment that is going to cost her \$400 a month. She is very upset. She let me know about it. She wants to know when this Congress is going to act. I told her I hope it was soon.

The Republican plan that was passed by this House by the narrow margin of 3 votes was an empty promise to our senior citizens. The Republican leadership let the private insurance companies control the prescription drug programs when the private insurance companies themselves were before this Congress for weeks before that vote telling us that they will not offer any prescription-only drug plans.

What really happened on the floor of this House is the big pharmaceutical manufacturers carried the day. After all, they had been running ads for weeks under a front group called Citizens for a Better Medicare, advertising