program to force savings and pay for some disability insurance while you are working, rather than risk the poor house.

At that time, there were something like 52 workers for each Social Security retiree. Remember, it is a pay-as-you-go program; existing current workers, pay in their Social Security tax and that tax immediately goes out to pay benefits for existing retirees. By the time we got to 1940, there were 38 people working paying in their taxes for every one retiree. This year we have three people working, three people working, paying in their taxes to cover each retiree's benefits.

A couple of things have happened. Politicians in this chamber, the Senate and the presidents decided to increase benefits over the years because it was popular. When there was not enough money, they increased taxes and borrowing. By 2025, over on the far right-hand side of this chart, you see there are only going to be two workers paying in their taxes for each retiree.

We started out back in 1940 having a 3 percent tax on the first $1,500 of wages. Today we have increased that to 12.4 percent on the first almost $76,000 of wages.

So I hope we all agree one of our challenges is not to increase taxes yet again. Demographics of longer life span and lower birth rates have also greatly affected solvency.

The diminishing return on our Social Security investment should concern us all. The real return of Social Security is less than 2 percent for the average worker in the United States.

Again, not counting the amount of the Social Security tax that pays for the disability insurance portion workers get a real return of less than 2 percent on the taxes paid in.

For some, there is zero return on their Social Security. They are never going to live long enough to get back what they and their employer put into it. But, still, 1.9 percent is the average.

Minorities do not get back what they pay in. A young black male, for example, is going live on the average 62 years. That means they pay in all of their life, but do not get benefits. But the average real return for the market, is over 7 percent. Part of the solution for Social Security has got to be a better return on the investment.

This chart shows the number of years you are going to have to live after retirement to get back the money that you and your employer paid in, just to break even. If you were lucky enough to retire in 1940, it took 2 months. If you retired 5 years ago, in 1995, you are going to have to live 16 years after retirement to break even. On average if you retire in 2005, 2015 or 2025, it is unlikely you are going to ever get back what you put into this system.

Even a ''C.D.'' or extra safe investments in the marketplace would give more to retirees. Governor Bush is suggesting limitations on any such investments; it can only be used for retirement purposes, it has to be limited to safe investments. We have companies now that will guarantee a return greater than Social Security without taking any risks. So, our challenge is we have to get people, this Congress, the President, to develop legislation to save Social Security.

It is easy to put off the fixing to the next generation or future congresses. Vice President Gore has suggested adding giant IOUs that demand increasing taxes later. The last president should have dealt with the problem. The next president should not put off solutions that will keep Social Security solvent for the next 75 years.

Right now there is enough money coming in to pay benefits, up until an estimated 2015. We need to take action. We cannot keep putting it off.

EPA HINDERING SMALL COMPANIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BALLENGER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BALLENGER. Madam Speaker, first let me give you a quick history of my company. I founded a company in Hickory North Carolina, in 1957 with a loan on my house. This company prints and converts polyethylene, polypropylene and cellophane for packaging for companies like Procter & Gamble and Johnson and Johnson for overwrap for cookies, baby diapers, the packages themselves. That is what the company does. It started off in 1957. At the present time we have 250 employees.

What I want to do is gripe. I would like to gripe about our government.

Several years ago, air pollution regulations went into effect. There was a whole list of various and sundry things that were polluting the air and doing horrible things to everybody's breathing and so forth. But at that time, my company, you have to print something on polyethylene that will evaporate and leave the ink there, so we were printing with methyl alcohol as a solvent and nylon as the coloring. You print the film, blow hot air at it, and evaporate the solvent. Well, what happened is the methyl alcohol at that time was going out the roof.

Along comes an outfit called EPA, and EPA, with this long list of pollutants, decided that methyl alcohol, this is 5 or 6 years after the whole thing started, 5 or 6 years later they decided that methyl alcohol was a positive solvent.

Well, I had seven printing presses in this plant of mine, and at that time we asked EPA, since they said we were polluting, what should we do? And they said, well, you have got to collect the solvent, the evaporating solvent, and destroy it. So we asked, could you give us some advice as to what to do? They said, well, we do not give advice, that is against the rules of the Federal government, but you have to do it.

Well, this thing right here that you see on my left is what is called a catalytic converter. What it does is it collects the printing inks above all the printing presses, all seven of them, and vents it through this unit right here. In the bottom here we have an oven that is heated by natural gas, and it costs, by the way, $50,000 a year in natural gas to run this. At the top comes out what is left over.

Well, $50,000 a year to operate and $600,000 a year to build it, and we were all set to go. We thought we were operating according to what the government wanted, and everything was fine, until a couple of years later they come back and they say, well, we have got a slight problem with your operation. There is pollution leaking out of your presses all through the building and so forth, so you have got to do something to stop that.

Well, again, they did not give us any information as to what we were going to do, so what we did is we built a wall all the way around this building and made it a separate room, and in this separate room we put forced air. The way we used the forced air was air conditioning. This is $500,000 worth of air conditioning that we installed, and that costs $50,000 a year to operate. What it did is it forced all the air to go through the system and go to the catalytic converter.

Well, this is great and wonderful. We have got the catalytic converter going, and the good old government comes up to us and says, I hate to say this to you, but you know those seven printing presses you have? Your catalytic converter is not big enough, it will only handle six printing presses. So they said, you have to shut down one of these printing presses. One of these printing presses costs about $800,000. So we had to shut down a $800,000 printing press at the request of our Federal Government to be able to handle this situation.

This all sounds like we were doing what I would consider the right thing as far as the ecology of the country is concerned, as far as what is expected of business people in this country, although in certain areas of the world I am quite sure this does not happen.

But what really bothered me was eventually I found out that a competitor of mine who had, roughly speaking, the same size plant that I had, went to EPA and discussed it with them, and they came up with a new conclusion. Their conclusion was to allow him to spend $50,000 a year penalty for the right to pollute.

Now, here is a man that I am competing with. I have spent over $1 million, that costs $60,000 a year, that costs $50,000 a year, I am spending $110,000 a year to take care of pollution, and he is paying $50,000 to do it on his own. This is what I consider the great and wonderful way that our Federal Government operates.

So with that kind of information I called up EPA and I said, what is going on here? This does not make a whole bunch of sense to me. And they said, well you have to realize we have inspectors all over the country, and everything is left up to the individual decision by each inspector. So the inspector came up with this brilliant idea

that I had to spend $1 million plus $100,000 a year in expenses, and my competitor only had to spend $50,000 a year.

I heard talk earlier about the difficulty of competing with China and imports. Well, I compete with on a regular basis with Taiwan, Korea and Mexico, and I would be willing to bet that none of these countries have even the slightest idea about trying to stop pollution. Yet in our country we have forced people to spend that kind of money.

I do wish the government would stop and think of what they are doing. They do not know what they are doing, and they ought to forget it.

RIGHT TO GO HOME ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, last year I introduced modest legislation that would allow seniors in managed care plans to return after a hospitalization to the retirement community they know, instead of a network HMO nursing home somewhere else. I offered the Right to Go Home Act on behalf of seniors who had been needlessly separated because of HMO rules from their loved ones and from their usual source of care.

It is difficult to believe a health plan would treat a hospitalized senior this way, until you speak to Medicare+Choice enrollees, privatized Medicare, if you will, who experienced it firsthand.

Take, for example, a couple in New Hampshire, separated after the husband's hospitalization because the HMO required him to be discharged to a nursing home in Maine, a 40 minute drive from the community where he and his wife had lived. Or a couple in Florida separated when their HMO required the wife to recuperate from a hospital stay in a nursing home 20 miles away from the retirement community. The husband had difficulty visiting her, and she died later at the HMO member facility.

A retirement community, a nursing facility, is more than just a health care provider; it is a home. Forced relocation means moving vulnerable patients, taking them away from providers experienced in these individual's chronic care needs. It places them in new, strange surroundings during that fragile period of recovery. It separates them from emotionally supportive family and friends.

Under our legislation, HMOs would not be required to pay a dime more for care provided at the beneficiary's retirement facility than in a network facility. What my bill would do is what HMOs should not need our prompting to do; that is, it allows hospitalized nursing home patients to recuperate near their loved ones.

Yet the HMO industry opposes this legislation. They lobbied for changes in the bill that effectively would exclude all but a small subset of seniors. Fortunately, the Committee on Ways and Means did not buckle under the pressure of the HMO industry. They included their legislation in their Balanced Budget Act Restoration proposal.

If the HMO lobby does not kill it, this legislation may make it into law. But the fact that Congress has to take action to ensure the well-being of hospitalized seniors in Plus Choice plans and the fact that the HMO industry would lobby against this bill should tell us something.

Those are facts Congress and the public should keep in mind as George W. Bush promotes commercial health insurance, as he promotes commercial health maintenance organizations, as a replacement, as a replacement, for Medicare.

George W. Bush believes Medicare should be turned over to private insurers. That is not conjecture, that is fact. Visit his web site. His plan is to establish a 4 year commission to restructure Medicare so that it is no longer a ''one-size-fits-all big government plan.''

Translate that into English. It means simply turning Medicare over to the private insurance industry. HMO's do some things well, but putting Medicare beneficiaries first is not one of them. How many times do we have to intervene with a managed care plan or other insurer on behalf of our constituents before the industry's loyalties become clear to us? Their loyalty is to their stockholders. No surprise there. It is verified every time managed care plans make decisions that fly in the face of good medicine.

Unshakeable loyalty to the bottom line results in decisions often not in the best interests of Medicare enrollees. Unconditional loyalty to the bottom line is what creates the need for a Patients' Bill of Rights. Unwavering loyalty to the bottom line explains why health insurers market to the healthiest individuals, the most profitable, and do everything in their power to avoid the rest; let government do that.

It explains how private managed care plans contracting with Medicare can enroll seniors one year, make money from them, and then cavalierly drop them the next when they are not quite as profitable. They promise supplemental benefits they cannot deliver; they blame the government then for problems that they, the insurance company-HMOs, create.

It explains how the managed care industry has the nerve, the outright arrogance, to lobby against legislation that costs them nothing and means the world to seniors in nursing homes. It is a disgrace.

The traditional Medicare program is different. It is universal, it is reliable, it is accountable to the public. Medicare's loyalty is to beneficiaries and to taxpayers. It is an undiluted commitment. Medicare offers choices in ways that actually make a difference in terms of health care quality in patient satisfaction.

Medicare does not tell beneficiaries which providers they can see; HMOs do. Medicare does not dictate which hospitals and nursing homes are permissible; HMOs do. Medicare does not discriminate between beneficiaries based on their health status; HMOs do. Medicare offers reliable coverage that does not come and go with the stock market.

So before voting for George W. Bush, I urge every American to think carefully about the wholesale changes he has in mind for Medicare.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 1 o'clock and 4 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m. today.

1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

Lord God,

The seasons change. Across this Nation the days grow shorter. Time passes quickly, and when death strikes any house, all human flesh seems vulnerable. Grant eternal peace to the Honorable BRUCE VENTO. Be now strength for his family, his staff and all who suffer at this moment.

Help all Your people to use the gift of time prudently, for You alone are the judge of the living and the dead.

During the time given to us on this Earth, may we choose to live as You would have us live, so that in the end we may have accomplished Your holy will and come to live in Your presence now and forever. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. MEEK) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. MEEK of Florida led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows: