Mr. GUTKNECHT. I guess we are not going to get an answer.

Mr. OBEY. That is the problem.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, how much is enough? $645 is the number. We can fuss about how we spend it, but $645 billion is the number. So let me remind everyone now when we are talking about numbers, when we started this year, the Republican budget said 627 was enough. The President said 637 was enough. The Republicans said that was too much. The Blue Dogs came in at 633 and said that is a reasonable compromise.

Well, where would we be tonight had the Republicans accepted our version and we would have been standing here tonight, and I suspect the gentleman from Wisconsin would have been agreeing with us on the 633, just like we are saying on the 645.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, if I can claim some time, having come from the State legislative ranks and now serving on the Committee on Appropriations, one of my big disappointments is that it seems that regardless of who is in charge, the budget is ignored; and I think we have to all hold the line on spending. I do not know why we ignore it year after year.

Mr. HAYWORTH. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, again, I thank my friend from Texas for bringing up a point and for his unending advocacy of the position of the Blue Dog Democrats. We look forward to working at a conservative governing coalition with my friend, provided that those who decide who comes back to this institution see fit to return to us, and we look forward to that.

Yes, I think it begs a larger question of budget reform; but it still does not change the dynamic, which is even if we were to agree on a number, is there any guarantee that our President would likewise agree? And therein lies the problem: a continual moving target.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, the President does not sign the budget resolutions. The President has no authority under the law to sign budget resolutions.

Mr. HAYWORTH. Again, I thank my friend from Wisconsin who is a master of process. However, there is a larger question.

Mr. Speaker, I extended to the gentleman the courtesy of not interrupting his speech, and I would appreciate the chance to respond, and then if my friend from Georgia chooses to yield the gentleman time, he can do so accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, the American people want to know, can we come to an agreement. I think there are many different alternatives there, many different ways to get there. But I would hope that in the immediate days ahead, the President will return from the campaign trail, and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), the Democratic leader, will return from the campaign trail, and that working together, we can find a way to put people before politics.

I have a great deal of respect for my friends on the other side of the aisle. There is not total agreement, but then again, that is the virtue, even with the challenge of serving in this institution; and I hope that we can put people before politics and people before process.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's courtesy, and I will be very brief.

Mr. KINGSTON. Let me say one thing about the courtesy. I appreciate you all mentioning that, but we are here, as my Democratic colleagues all are here, because we really do want to resolve this. We have philosophical differences, but I think everybody in this Chamber knows that the people want a product here. So I think we are all here because we want to do the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I totally agree. When we talk about process, for 16 years of my 22, I was in the majority party, and many on the Republican side blamed me as a Democrat for being part of the big spending problem. And I had to accept it, because we were in the majority.

My frustration with the Republican side, with the Republican leadership, not with my colleagues here tonight, but my frustration is, the Republicans continue to point the finger of blame at the minority side, and everyone that understands the process, understands that minorities cannot achieve that which the majority does not go along with.

Mr. Speaker, a little constitutional reminder: when the President is of the other party, the President has sufficient power, and the only way we can beat a President is with a two-thirds vote override. When we have a very small majority, it is important that we work to achieve some help on the other side.

My frustration is that at no time during the last 2 years has the Republican side ever attempted to work to override the President.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, we only have 2 minutes remaining. I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT).

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, in summation, I think people of goodwill ought to be able to resolve this. I think the American people are really pretty tired of the partisan bickering. I have said from the beginning, it would seem to me that reasonable people could come up with a final number and then work out these differences.

I do not think they are that big, but apparently some people believe that they could gain some political advantage by holding the Congress hostage through the month of October, and that strategy has not worked. Now, maybe after the break, we can come back and get this thing resolved.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH).

Mr. HAYWORTH. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Georgia, and I thank my friends from the other side of the aisle who have taken the time to come down and offer their insights, their perspectives. I think even as frustrating as it gets, I think we ought to give thanks that we bring to this Chamber honest opinions and convictions, deeply held; and in an imperfect world, we attempt to find some sort of consensus and compromise. I think it is worth noting, as my friend from Texas has pointed out time and again, we have exceeded in terms of spending; and as my friend from Minnesota points out, the target tends to change, and again the question is, how much is enough?

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the participants of this Special Order and thank everyone for trying to keep working on these things dark into the night. Maybe, if we can get a few of our colleagues back here with us, we could resolve this.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment a joint resolution of the House of the following title:

H.J. Res. 123. Joint resolution making further continuing appropriations for the fiscal year 2001, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the Senate has passed a concurrent resolution of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. Con. Res. 160. Concurrent resolution providing for a conditional adjournment or recess of the Senate and a conditional adjournment of the House of Representatives.

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ISSUES OF CONCERN TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE NOT ADDRESSED BY THE 106TH CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PITTS). 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, earlier this evening I was concerned because I think the impression was being given by the Republican leadership and my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that if we stayed here the next few days, that we were going to be able to accomplish something.

I think that was a false impression, because we all know that the other body has already gone home and passed a continuing resolution that brings the other body back I think on November 13 or 14. So as much as my House colleagues and the Republican leadership

here in the House may feel that they are accomplishing something by being here for the next few days prior to the election, the bottom line is that they cannot accomplish anything because the other body, the Senate, is simply not here.

So it is hard for me to understand why my colleagues on the Republican side are being critical because some Members of either party do not happen to be here, because we all know that absolutely nothing can be accomplished.

I have listened to the debate back and forth in the last hour or two, and I know that what we are trying to do, what my Republican colleagues were trying to do, certainly, was to suggest that there have been great accomplishments made in this Congress.

I have been very critical of the fact, particularly with regard to health care, that the issues that the American people really care about, the ones that affect their lives, whether it be Medicare prescription drugs, because they do not have access to prescription drugs or because they are not affordable, or the issue of HMO abuse and the need for reform of the HMO system, these types of issues have not been addressed.

Also, there is the issue of trying to deal with the uninsured. We have now 42 million Americans who do not have health insurance. That needs to be addressed. It is not being addressed.

Reference was made to the fact that the Democrats have been trying to pass a labor-health appropriations bill that would provide additional funding for local education, give money back to the school districts around the country so they can hire more teachers and reduce class size, give money back so they can modernize their schools, renovate school buildings that are falling apart, or build new schools where there is overcrowding.

That has been a major issue in one of these appropriation bills that is still outstanding, yet it has not been addressed by the Republican leadership.

There are so many issues like that. The larger issue of what we are going to do about social security and Medicare is important, because we know that in another 20 or 30 years the money is going to start to run out, and the question is whether or not we are going to have some kind of long-term plan to do that, to deal with that.

These are the issues that my constituents talk about when I go home. They are concerned about quality education, they are concerned about health care, they are concerned about retirement security with regard to social security. These issues have not been addressed.

There is absolutely no way those issues are going to be addressed in the next few days prior to the election, so to suggest somehow that they could be I think is just basically a hoax, if you will, on the American people. There is no basis to it whatsoever.

Several times my colleagues, myself and others, have made reference particularly to an editorial that was in the New York Times just this past Wednesday, November 1. I thought that pretty much summed it up. I am not going to read the whole editorial, but it is entitled ''An Ineffectual Congress.''

It says: ''The 106th Congress, with little to show for its 2 years of existence, has all but vanished from public discourse.'' What they mean by that is that nobody is really paying attention to what we do anymore. It is no wonder that certain numbers of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle have gone home prior to the election, because they know that there is nothing to be done here.

The editorial continues. It says: ''Nobody, least of all the presidential candidates, are talking about this particular Congress, and the reason is plain. On almost every matter of importance, gun control, Patients' Bill of Rights, energy deregulation, social security, Congress has done little or nothing, failing to produce a record worthy of either celebration or condemnation.''

I suppose it is the ultimate ridicule when the New York Times tells them that they have done neither anything good nor bad, they have done nothing at all.

''Nor has the Congress been able to complete even the most basic business, the appropriation bills that keep the government functioning. Three have been vetoed. Absent a burst of statesmanship in the next few days, it is possible that Congress will have to come back after election day to complete work on the Federal budget.''

The bottom line is, once the other body, the Senate, went home, that is a fait accompli. That is going to happen. There is absolutely no way that anything happens here. It is going to happen on November 13, in what we call a lame duck session. There is no way to avoid that anymore because the other body has left.

The editorial goes on to say: ''But if Congress has done a lousy job for the public at large, it is doing a fabulous job of feathering its own nest and rewarding commercial interests and favored constituencies with last-minute legislative surprises that neither the public nor most Members of Congress have digested.''

What we have been saying, a lot of the Democrats have been saying, the problem with the Republican leadership is not only have they not done the people's business to get the appropriations and budget through, not only have they not addressed the major issues, such as health care, but they are doing nothing. If they do anything, it is something that favors the special interests.

It is very sad. I have seen this happen with almost every major issue. If we talk about prescription drugs, I made the point earlier this evening, when we were having some dialogue during the 1-minute speeches, that this body never passed, the Republicans never passed, the Medicare prescription drug bill.

Mr. Speaker, my point is that what we have seen with the Republican leadership is that whatever they do is essentially favoring special interests.

When I was talking earlier this evening during the 1-minutes, one of my colleagues on the Republican side, I think the gentleman from California who is on the Committee on Ways and Means, he said, well, we passed a Medicare prescription drug bill. Well, it is not true, we did not pass a bill. The Republicans did not bring up a bill that would actually put a prescription benefit under Medicare.

What they did was passed a system which I call a voucher, where they essentially give some money to seniors and say, go out and try to find an HMO or some kind of insurance company that will cover your prescription drugs.

The bottom line is that the seniors cannot do that because it is outside of Medicare. There is not an insurance company that is going to give them that kind of policy for the amount of money that the Republicans are offering. They may end up in an HMO. We know about all the problems we have had with HMOs that have dropped seniors.

So they have not passed a Medicare prescription drug bill, a benefit under Medicare. The reason is because the pharmaceutical companies do not want that to happen. They do not want to have a benefit under Medicare. They want to see what they can do somehow to avoid Medicare covering prescription drugs.

So there are so many examples like this with the special interests. I see some of my colleagues are here, Mr. Speaker. I yield to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. TANNER).

Mr. TANNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey for yielding to me. He is right about the prescription drug issue.

Let me just say this: The prescription drug issue cannot be resolved through an insurance-based model. I am in the insurance business at home, and was before I came here. Insurance is based on a spreading of risk.

To use an example, if an insurance company insures 100 homes against fire, the odds are only two of them or one of them are going to burn that year, so they use the premiums paid for the other 98 or 99 to pay the one that burned.

The problem with the Republican model is that they want to use the HMO model for a prescription drug benefit, and it will not work because every policyholder will also be a claimant, and there is no way that works under an insurance model.

The reason Medicare came into being was because senior citizens who are sick and old could not get insurance, health insurance, for any price in the private marketplace, and with good reason, they are old and sick. I will be old and sick some day, if I am not already. That will not work.

What we have to have if we are going to have a meaningful program is we have to have a Medicare derivative that is a part of Medicare to say to seniors, this is your prescription drug benefit, no matter where you live or what you do. Now, I want to thank the gentleman for having this special order tonight to let us have a chance to discuss this.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the gentleman said, because in fact, and I think the same person who represented the health insurance industry who addressed the Committee on Commerce that I am on went to the gentleman's Committee on Ways and Means hearing when the Republican prescription drug proposal came up, and he said, I forget his name, I think Kahn is his name, he said exactly that. He said the reason that this Republican proposal will not work is because the prescription drugs are a benefit, they are not something that is a risk, so everybody wants it. Everybody is going to sign up.

Everybody needs the prescription drugs, and no insurance company is going to insure something that everybody is going to take advantage of.

Mr. TANNER. No insurance company can survive when every policyholder is also a claimant. That is not hard to understand.

Mr. PALLONE. Exactly. That is why they said they would not do it.

In fact, they had the example we mentioned several times here on the floor where I think it was back in March of this year the State of Nevada passed on a State level a plan or proposal that was very similar to the Republican model that the gentleman mentioned, and for something like 6 months they could not get any insurance company to come in and even propose to sell the insurance.

I was told a couple of weeks ago they finally got one company that says that they might be able to do it, but I have to see over the next few weeks whether that happens or not. But for 6 months they could not find anybody to even consider it, for exactly the same reason, that it is a benefit that everybody is going to take advantage of.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY), who has been on our Health Care Task Force. He is one of the co-chairs for the whole 2 years, and has talked a lot about this.

Mr. BERRY. I thank my colleague from New Jersey, Mr. Speaker, and I thank him also for his leadership and the leadership of our other colleagues who have joined us here this evening, the distinguished gentlemen from Texas and Tennessee.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard much rhetoric, election-year rhetoric this evening, and for the last few weeks especially. There is plenty of effort to say, let us blame someone.

I have only been here almost 4 years, and it has been interesting to listen to this rhetoric, and interestingly enough, it is always the Democrats that cause the problem. Even when we were not in the White House, it was the Democrats. When we are not in charge of the Congress, it is the Democrats. It does not make any difference, even when we are not in the majority and when we are not in the White House, we still cause the problem. I find that a bit interesting.

The fact is, the question about how much is enough is answered by the majority party. That is the Republicans. Just a few weeks ago they raised the budget limits, the budget caps, one more time. I did not vote for it, I do not think anyone in this room voted for it, but they raised it. They are in the majority. That is their job.

As they asked that question, I also wonder, how much is enough, when they tried to give $11.5 to the insurance companies last week that there is absolutely no justification for. How much is enough? Maybe we should give these insurance companies, they think maybe $20 billion. How much is enough? That is enough money to provide a real nice prescription drug benefit for our seniors for a year.

They tried to give $15 billion to the bond arbitrage folks that do that job, instead of letting it go to the schools, like we had intended. How much is enough? How much money do we just give away when there is absolutely no indication that there is a need for that money?

So I wonder myself how much is enough. I think we have had enough. I think it is time for this Congress to face up to its obligations. I can tell the gentleman this for absolute certainty: In the district that I am fortunate to represent, and I was there this morning, I met with more senior citizens that still do not have a prescription drug benefit with their Medicare policy. They are still paying three times as much for their medicine as any other country in the world, and it is not right. It is not fair. It does not make any difference whether it is the Democrats or Republicans. It does not make any difference about how much is enough.

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We know that that is not fair. It is not right, and it is time we do something with it about it. This Congress is not here tonight dealing with that like they should be. We are listening to all of these silly questions. We are listening to this rhetoric, and it is time that this Congress dealt with that. Our Republican colleagues just a few minutes ago they said we passed a prescription drug benefit; that is just simply not true. They did not pass one. They voted on one in this House. They did not make it into law. They never intended to.

They did not help those seniors I just talked about. They still have the problem. We still have seniors in the district that I represent that do not know whether or not tonight they are going to have something to eat because they had to buy their medicines. That is not right. It is not right for our colleagues across the aisle to try to cloud the issue.

We had their Presidential candidate a few weeks ago in a debate. He loved to use the word fuzzy numbers. He kept talking about fuzzy numbers. Well, there is nothing fuzzy about a senior citizen that does not have the money to buy the medicine and buy their food. There is nothing fuzzy about that. There is nothing cute about it. There is nothing funny about it, and it is a shame that the Republicans have chosen to just ignore this issue, let it go on and on and hope it will go away somewhere.

We have real people that feel real pain, and it is not right. These are the people that worked hard, played by the rules, and we had assured them we were going to give them health care and Social Security when they retire and things will be all right if you do this. It is not right to let that continue to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell my colleagues another thing for certain, we do not have a patients' bill of rights. They have done the same thing. We have people in the district that I represent tonight that do not know whether or not the insurance is going to pay for their health care or not, because some clerk said we can make more money for the company if we do not pay for it. The doctor and the patient still cannot make that decision, and it is not right.

It is time that we do something about it. My distinguished friend and colleague, the gentleman from West Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), mentioned earlier this evening the one thing we absolutely cannot do is allow this Congress to end until we deal with the Medicare reimbursement schedules for our hospitals, nursing homes and our home health care providers and some of our other Medicare providers.

We are about to tear and destroy the very fabric of rural health care in this country if we do not do something about this, and we should do it in the morning. We should come back to this floor and take care of that problem. It is not right. I know for certain that those things have not been dealt with appropriately by this Congress.

It does not make any difference whether it is Republicans or Democrats. We have real people feeling real pain and doing without the necessities of life and the richest country that has ever been in the history of the world and we have people over here asking silly questions like how much is enough.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to mention briefly what happened with the HMOs, this bill that was mentioned that came up last week.

In New Jersey, and I think nationwide, we know that only 15 percent of the seniors are in an HMO, only 15 percent of the Medicare recipients are in an HMO. In my district, and I am sure in many of my colleagues, I guess it

was July 1 or just prior thereto, a lot of the seniors who were signed up for the HMOs got a notice saying that by the end of the year they were going to be dropped.

They were very upset and they called my office and they wrote to me. A lot of them did not even know that they could go back to the traditional Medicare, which they can, but as my colleagues know, that traditional Medicare does not have a prescription drug benefit. So they were very upset with the fact that they were being dropped.

I, in response to that, actually introduced a bill that would give a higher reimbursement rate to the HMOs, but I also realized that just giving them more money was not going to be good enough, that we had to put some kind of accountability in there. And as my colleagues know, I have talked about and we have actually voted on it, although the Republicans voted against it, the idea that they would have to stay in the system, in the Medicare system, for 3 years if they have a higher reimbursement rate, and they could not reduce their benefits, they could not, you know, for example, decide they were not going to observe prescription drugs. Of course, Republicans opposed that.

What basically the Republican leadership did with this bill is to say we are going to give you all this extra money. The gentleman mentioned $11 billion, and that is about 40-some percent of the total that is going in this bill back to providers, between the hospitals, the nursing homes, the home health agencies, the HMOs. The HMOs get over 40 percent, yet they only represent 15 percent of the seniors.

They are dropping almost a million seniors now since they got involved in the Medicare program. It is just crazy. How do you do that? How do you do that? The answer is very simple, and that is because the HMOs are aligned with the Republican leadership, and they are opposing the HMO reform. They are opposing the Medicare prescription drug, and they basically take the money that they get and they use it to lobby and to work against candidates who support Medicare prescription drug benefit and HMO reform.

Mr. Speaker, I mean it is just so obvious how this special interest money is operating here. They just want to give more money to the HMO. I do not know how they get away with it. Hopefully they will not get away with it.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM).

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) for yielding, and I want to pick up on the gentleman's comments and the comments of the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) a moment ago in which he talked about his concern about us leaving town without dealing with the Medicare/Medicaid givebacks. That bothers me.

It bothers a lot of my constituents who are worried that this finger-pointing game that we are in and this impasse that we are in is going to end, that we are going to end up this year without dealing with their problem, and we are not.

I wished it were possible for to us do it tomorrow morning, but my purpose in being here for the third time today is to begin hopefully to stop the finger-pointing and begin to acknowledge the fact that we are not going to accomplish anything more of substance this year until the election, not this year, until the election. We say we are going to be working.

I am chuckling now and, I guess, permit me one little finger-pointing of my own, Mr. Speaker, tonight. There has been a lot of rhetoric that we are here to work, but the only person I see from the other side of the aisle that is here right now is the Speaker, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS). And I apologize for keeping the gentleman, and I apologize for keeping these staff here tonight if we are convincing that we are doing work to resolve this problem, because we are not.

The Senate has gone home. I am afraid that we are going to come here in the morning and we are going to start the finger-pointing all over again, and that is not going to resolve anything. The facts are this Congress has thus far failed in doing our work, and we have failed in dealing with our hospitals and our nursing homes. We have failed to resolve that. And as we heard the previous discourse, but when we had our friends from the other side here, and they were so kind to yield to us, we could find that there was a lot of room and agreement, but the leadership of the House and the White House, et cetera, have not been able to resolve it. That is what I am worried about.

I would hope that anyone that is concerned about us going home December the 31 without resolving the health care or the Medicare/Medicaid giveback, the BBA fix, that you would breathe easier, because we will not finish this year's work without dealing with that problem for sure. Perhaps, we can deal with some of the others.

I would hope we can deal with the pharmaceutical question. I would hope we can deal with the patients' bill of rights. I would hope that we can do a lot of other things, but if we have to prioritize, this is one that is of a high priority.

It is important, I think, for us to stop the finger-pointing. I think that is clear, and the people are going to separate that one come November the 7th. No matter how you color it, there has been a failure of leadership in the Congress of doing our work, and as I said a moment ago, I get a little bit testy when I hear it blamed on the minority.

As I said before, I have been here in the majority for 16 years, and I caught a lot of blame, because when we Democrats had control of the House, we were not perfect. But I get a little bit ticked now when I continue to get the blame for not getting our work done. For my friends on the other side of the aisle to continue to come in and to blame the President, because he made us increase spending to $645 billion, I remember so many times in which I have said when I was here with the Reagan administration and the Bush administration and, before that, the Carter Administration, Presidents do not spend money.

There is no possible way for a President to spend money that the Congress does not first appropriate. Now, it often depends on who is in charge and who is pointing the fingers who you were going to blame, but it matters not whether it was a Republican President or a Democratic President, you are still not going to spend money that the Congress does not first appropriate.

If you have a difference between the administration and the Congress, because they are in different parties, if you are going to beat the President, which it seems there has been a dedication, at least on some in the leadership on the other side of the aisle that they have got to beat the President, the only way you beat the President is by getting a two thirds vote. That is what the Constitution provides.

I have said over and over if you want to beat the President, you have to got to reach out to the other side.

My frustration on the one area that I am the most extremely concerned about is in the area of the balanced budget givebacks, if we should not accomplish our work, I will have 10 hospitals to 12 hospitals in my district close within the next 6 months. If we are not able to resolve that question, that is what will happen.

But what my friends in this body, particularly on the majority side, do not seem to understand, the same leader that was responsible for the most part for writing the Balanced Budget Agreement in 1997 that has caused the problem for Medicare and Medicaid is the same leader that has given us his version of how we fix it and said take it or leave it and we will not negotiate that any further.

Now, we have a bill, as my friend, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE), has stated, we have a bill that has been reintroduced in which we will deal with some specifics. I think it is extremely important that we give a full hospital prospective payment system update for 2 years, not just for 1 year. Because we have so many of our hospitals today that are dealing with so much uncertainty. They are already in the red. They are facing difficulty of borrowing money, and all it seems that the majority wants to say is we are going to give you one more year and then we are going to start cutting you again.

How are you going to deal with that?

Our bill improves the formula for rural disproportionate share hospitals, a higher level of reimbursement for rural hospitals that serve low-income individuals of which, unfortunately, rural America is not sharing in the economic boom that the rest of America is sharing in, and, therefore, we on

this side believe that that should be acknowledged. The majority has said, thanks but no thanks; this is all we can do.

We provide for a 10 percent bonus for rural health agencies to compensate for the high cost of travel. The majority has said thanks but no thanks. We provide for a 2-year delay in the 15 percent cuts in payments for home health agencies. Again, the majority has said thanks but no thanks.

Interestingly, this might sound like that we are wanting to spend more money, but our bill actually spends less over 5-year and 10-year periods than the majority proposal does.

You would never believe that when you listen to the majority in here, and particularly the gentleman from California, who so eloquently talks about his version of it. I do not pretend for a moment that I am smarter than they are, but I do respectfully ask from time to time to at least consider the views of some on this side of the aisle and allow us to have some input.

The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY), the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) have spent hours looking at the pharmaceutical benefit question. The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) has looked at the education question over and over and over again. He has some different ideas.

What is wrong with allowing the minority to have some input? If you do, you might be surprised. You might be surprised and find out that if the President disagrees, then there might be 290 that would disagree with the President, but I do not think that that would happen.

Again, this ''how much is enough?'' I do not remember how many times we have to answer the question. We still bring out the silly chart. When you are in the majority, you run this place, or at least you try to. You set the cap at $645 billion, which is $12 billion more than I think it ought to be, and $8 billion more than the President thought it ought to be. And no matter how many times you say how much is enough, you are not going to change that fact.

Let me just say enough is enough. We have to find a way to wind this down. There is nothing else going to happen of a positive nature, other than perhaps we will pass the National Park bill tomorrow morning. From what I understand, we are going to spend some more money, you might have to increase the budget caps again, not with my vote.

We might do that tomorrow on the budget. I do not know. I hope I am wrong what I have been hearing about that. We ought not to have been here today. We ought not to have been here yesterday. Here again, the finger-pointing. I hope tomorrow that we can get through this without any more finger-pointing.

Let us let all the finger pointing stop tonight. I was reminded a long time ago, when you are pointing a finger, there are three pointing back at you.

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There are three pointing back at me tonight.

But I, again, will make this request, in case there is going to be a temptation of the other side to point the finger again in the morning regarding where the President is tonight and where the Minority Leader is tonight, where they are tomorrow. Were there any meetings to work out the differences yesterday? Were there any meetings last Friday, last Saturday, last Sunday, last Monday, last Tuesday up to 1 o'clock and even yesterday?

Were there any meetings requested by the other side of the aisle to my side of the aisle in which we said, thanks, but no thanks, we do not wish to negotiate? If there are, I would like for somebody to come in and correct me, and I will eat the humble pie. But I think the facts are there had not been.

It is all a rhetorical game. It is all political rhetoric that is designed to benefit somebody by November 7. Well, it does not solve many problems. What we should have been doing last Friday since we were here working and every time we say this, work, work, work, well, there is four of us here working tonight.

But we are immaterial at this point in time, because the Senate has gone home. The House, all 435 of us, could be here working, and nothing would come of it. So hopefully tonight will be the last time until November 8 that we start the finger pointing.

But I hope when we come back November 8 or 9 or whenever we come back in the lame duck session, that we will come back with a different attitude, whoever wins the majority. I hope there will be enough of us to say enough is enough, not on the spending level, but enough is enough with the finger pointing.

I certainly hope, and I assure those out there in each of our 50 States that are worried about whether we are going to get our Nation's business done by December 31, ''you ain't seen nothing yet'' as far as disruptions if we find we are unable to work out a satisfactory compromise that will deal with our nursing homes and our hospitals and our reimbursement rate. That one is a must.

I say this very respectfully and with a lot of assurance, there will be bipartisan agreement to that. This will not be a partisan issue after November 7. There are enough folks, Mr. Speaker, on the other side of the aisle that absolutely agree.

Our problem tonight is a leadership problem. It has been a strategy, and we will see next week whose strategy has worked and whose has not. But I hope tomorrow, and to those that say it has got to be bipartisan, let the record clearly show, if it takes a Democrat to say it is time for us to go home and come back in a lame duck session, Mr. Speaker, I am saying it right now. Nothing additional of a positive nature can be accomplished past tomorrow.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I just have to reiterate the same thing. I mean, the bottom line is that we are having these discussions about what should be or what legislation we would like to see pass, but there is absolutely no way that any of it can because the other body has left.

So probably the best thing to leave everyone with tonight is the notion and the understanding that all these suggestions about working or continuing the session over the next few days just do not make any sense because there is no way to get anything done as long as the other body has left.

I just wanted to say a couple of things now. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) brought up this whole issue of the balanced budget amendment givebacks or however we are describing it, the problem, with the balanced budget agreement, that we still have a problem with our hospitals, our nursing homes, because the reimbursement level is not high enough, and the effort that we have been trying to work on a bipartisan basis, theoretically, to try to work that out and give some more money back.

It is interesting because we have been critical of the Republican proposal that was voted on last week because it basically gave most of the money or the lion's share of the money to the HMOs without any accountability and did not give enough money to the hospitals, the nursing homes, the home health cares, the basic providers of health care services.

But the bill that the gentleman from Texas talked about, the Democratic alternative, actually the one that we brought up as an alternative to this Republican bill, actually, when I look at it, most of it was actually adopted in my committee in the Committee on Commerce on a bipartisan basis.

I do not know exactly what happened to it after it left the Committee on Commerce because we had a unanimous vote with both Democrats and Republicans to do exactly what the gentleman is proposing, which would have helped the hospitals and nursing homes. Somehow, by the time it got from the committee to the floor, it changed dramatically to what we have now.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM).

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me. I thank the gentleman for making that point. That is a good question. What did happen? When we have a unanimous vote in the Committee on Commerce, what happened in the Committee on Ways and Means?

What is it that causes the leadership now to say what we did in the Committee on Commerce is no good, but what was done in the Committee on Ways and Means, not in a bipartisan way, but in a pure partisan way, is the only way to go, and we have to take it or leave it. I do not understand that.

That is not what this body, this House of Representatives, this body

that has for so long prided itself on doing the people's business, on having committees that actually function, and having committees that will listen to the minority, and if I minority has a good idea, accept it.

I happen to serve on the Committee on Agriculture. I am the minority on the Committee on Agriculture. Under the leadership of the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST), we do not have that problem. We have always had a give-and-take. We do not have any problems. When you see Committee on Agriculture bills come to the floor, very seldom do you have differences from the Committee. Very seldom do we get unanimous agreement in this House, but the process worked.

The process in the Committee on Ways and Means is not working. Because the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. TANNER) who was here a moment ago is on the Committee on Ways and Means, but he is on the minority. When you stop allowing the minority to have their views heard and voted upon and then it voted down, then you bring it to the floor, and if you get disagreement here, then you had better hope that you have got the President with you because, if not, nothing is going to happen. But something broke down, and that is what is causing the fussing today.

But I suspect that, if we had a unanimous agreement in the Committee on Commerce, that when we come back after November 7, that cooler heads will prevail, and that if by chance, their bill, our bill, it would not surprise me if we are going to have bipartisan support for it when it comes back. Those that say no, we are only going to do it our way or the highway, perhaps they will be on the highway.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I think the only thing I can conclude is that the major difference, of course, is that, by the time the bill came to the floor, it was weighted heavily in favor of the HMOs. Of course I conclude that that is because the majority, the Republican leadership wanted to give a lot more money to the HMOs. I think that is really what happened.

I just wanted to make a few points. I do not want to belabor it too much, because I do not know how much more time we have or how much my colleagues want to speak. But I would say that the three issues that I sort of highlighted and that the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) have highlighted also over the last 2 years, when we talk about health care, HMO reform, prescription drug benefit under Medicare and trying to help the 40 million plus uninsured all relate to this bill that we have been talking about tonight.

What the Democrats try to do and what we did on a bipartisan basis in the Committee on Commerce with the bill actually helped in each of those areas in some ways because probably the biggest initiative to try to deal with the uninsured was the kids health care initiative that we passed on a bipartisan basis a couple years ago.

In this bill that we were trying to bring to the floor last week as an alternative to the Republicans with their HMOs, we actually expanded the kids health care program to do more outreach and to sign up more kids so that we would actually reduce the ranks of the uninsured.

In addition, in this bill, we talk about HMO reform. In the bill, there was an appeals process for people under Medicare who had been denied an operation or length of stay in the hospital a particular procedure by the HMO, that they could take an appeal where they were granted rights very similar to the Patients' Bill of Rights that passed in this House on a bipartisan basis.

But of course the Republican leadership has stymied. So in that bill, which, again, they rejected, we actually would try to make a little bit of a step towards HMO reform as well.

Then, finally, the whole issue of prescription drugs was addressed to some extent because, right now, the main way that people get prescription drugs under Medicare is if they are able to sign up for an HMO. What we did in our bill was to say that, if the HMOs are going to get more money, they had to stay in the program for 3 years, and they could not reduce their benefits, which is primarily prescription drugs.

So with this bill that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) was talking about, this Democratic, really, bipartisan alternative that the Republican leadership rejected, we were in some small way addressing each of these major health care issues that the gentleman from Texas, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) and I have been talking about and trying to address.

So granted there is not any time left before the election, but when we come back for the lame duck session, if we could manage to get this alternative with regard to the givebacks, the higher Medicare reimbursement rate passed, we would make a small step towards dealing with some of these health care issues, in my opinion.

It is very unfortunate that the Republican leadership rejected this and just went ahead with this bill that really does nothing but help the HMOs without any accountability.

I mean, it is one of the reasons that I am so upset with the fact that they rejected this and they refused to negotiate, and essentially nothing is happening. I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY).

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, well, I think the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) makes a strong point and also the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM).

The fact remains that we have not gotten the job done for the American people on health care. One of the proudest moments that I have there in this House was the day that we passed, in a bipartisan way, a strong bipartisan way, a meaningful, effective Patients' Bill of Rights.

Republicans and Democrats worked together to get the job done. We have proven over and over again in this body that, when we work together, good things happen. Very seldom does a really meaningful piece of legislation ever go through this House that is not bipartisan. Yet, we continue this partisan bickering. The American people do not care about this. They want us to get the job done, and it is time for us to do that.

I would hope that, when we do come back, whether it be this year or in the 107th Congress, that we will, in a bipartisan way, address these things that are so desperately needed in this country, like a Patients' Bill of Rights, and do it in a bipartisan way.

I have never on issues pertaining to health care and the budget had any effort whatsoever made from the other side to even listen to our ideas, much less accept them, work together and try to work out a solution. I think it would be a wonderful thing if we would do that in a bipartisan way and solve some of these problems.

We have got to solve the problem of our reimbursements for our hospitals, nursing homes, home health care providers. We know that.

The distinguished gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) has said earlier we cannot allow our rural hospitals to be destroyed because we did not deal with this problem. We have got to have prescription medicine for our seniors, and in a meaningful way, not in some clever gimmick that someone has thought up. We can do this in a bipartisan way.

I hope we come back after this time that we have spent here adjourns, and we go home, that we come back with a new resolve to get the job done in a bipartisan way.

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Certainly I think, to answer that question once again, how much is enough, certainly this is enough, and it is time for us to stop this, get the job done, get our work done, do what the American people sent us here to do, and not continue this partisan bickering that we get blamed for and justifiably so. I thank the gentleman from New Jersey for his leadership.

Mr. PALLONE. I want to thank my colleagues. I think that we have made the point well this evening that we really want to get the work done and we want to accomplish things for the average American. Our only frustration tonight has been that we know that the Senate is out and there is no time to do this between now and election day. So let us just hope that tomorrow as the gentleman from Texas said that we stop the partisan bickering and basically recognize the fact that the time has run out and the only way we are going to accomplish this is when we come back after the election.