RECOGNITION OF ROXBOROUGH MEMORIAL HOSPITAL REHABILITATION UNIT DURING NATIONAL REHABILITATION WEEK

HON. CHAKA FATTAH

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 18, 2002

Mr. FATTAH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the importance of National Rehabilitation Week, as well as congratulating the accomplishments of the Rehabilitation Unit at Roxborough Memorial Hospital.

Each year, thousands of rehabilitation providers and health and human services agencies join together during the third week in September to celebrate the powers of rehabilitation and share the message that through rehabilitation there is hope, achievement, and success. To answer the need to educate people throughout the United States, Allied Services healthcare system first celebrated National Rehabilitation Week in 1976. What began as a small scale local awareness campaign 26 years ago has steadily grown in scope over the years.

The Rehabilitation Unit at Roxborough Memorial Hospital is dedicated to serving the rehabilitative needs of the Roxborough community. Rehabilitative therapy allows many victims of injury and illness to achieve independence and improved quality of life. Individuals with disabilities have found hope, spirit, and dignity through the service of rehabilitation medicine.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the Rehabilitation Unit at Roxborough Memorial Hospital for their tireless dedication to help patients work to regain strength, confidence, and daily living skills after a disabling injury or illness.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

HON. JUANITA MILLENDER-McDONALD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 18, 2002

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, our Nation and its seniors are experiencing a crisis regarding Medicare benefits and specifically prescription drugs. This issue is of vital concern to them. Furthermore, in my Congressional District, my constituents consistently raise questions to me about what looms on the horizon as it relates to them obtaining a prescription drug benefit, because the cost of prescription drugs is so high.

At the current time, seniors on fixed incomes are confronted with escalating prices for medication and private companies are offering benefits that are grossly inadequate. Meanwhile, the majority's proposal will force seniors to shop for and buy a private insurance plan.

The truth is, seniors are pawns in the corporate and political game of prescription drugs. They are being forced to choose between buying food or their medication. No matter what choice they make, their health is still imperiled. It is unfair and unconscionable that our seniors are being treated in this manner. They deserve far better treatment.

Democrats support a Medicare prescription drug benefit that covers all seniors under Medicare, a benefit that would be voluntary and universal. I fully support the Democratic proposal, and I also support the proposals put forward by AARP.

If we look at the facts and put aside the rhetoric, the facts are clear. Soaring prices for prescription drugs are putting medicine out of reach for millions of seniors.

We Democrats support a Medicare prescription drug benefit that covers all seniors. Every senior would have access, regardless of where he or she lives and the amount of their income.

However, the House Republican prescription drug plan is a sham proposal that provides no real guarantee at all. Their plan will not cover all seniors. In fact, the benefit will be so limited that it won't be worthwhile for many middle-income seniors to enroll. Moreover, the Republican plan forces seniors to shop for and buy a private insurance plan, making it a hassle for older Americans who will have to contend with insurance plans that come and go.

Democrats know that this model doesn't work. The model didn't work in 1965, and that's why we created Medicare. Even the insurance companies say it won't work—the Health Insurance Association of America has said that they will not offer drug-only policies. Simply put, the Republican plan is guaranteed to fail.

Let me also emphasize that the Republican prescription drug plan does absolutely nothing to slow prescription drug prices from continuing their upward spiral.

It is time for my majority colleagues to come clean. Now is the time to pass a meaningful prescription drug plan that uses Medicare to make drugs affordable and which provides a universal, voluntary benefit for all seniors. If we closely examine the proposals put forward by the majority, it is abundantly clear what they are doing. They say ''Lower the cost of prescription drugs now,'' but that really only translates to ''take credit for minimal discounts that are already available.''

The facts are crystal clear, the so-called discounts will be nothing more than minimal discounts from programs that are readily available in the marketplace today. Furthermore, these programs advertise far better savings than what they actually offer.

Another mantra being repeated constantly is ''guarantee all senior citizens prescription drug coverage,'' but the translation is ''promise seniors an inadequate drug benefit offered by private insurance companies.''

At the end of the day, when seniors have to check their bank balances, there is no getting around the reality that an inadequate drug benefit offered by private insurance companies is really no guarantee whatsoever.

Early reports indicate that the Republican plan has major gaps and their prescription drug plan will leave Medicare beneficiaries 100% financially liable for thousands of dollars in drug costs. At the same time insurers can charge whatever they want and discriminate against the most vulnerable, including those with disabilities.

What we must do as Democrats is improve Medicare by providing more choices and savings, not by shifting costs to seniors and limiting the choice of providers.

My seniors are telling me that they think the Republican proposals will not result in more health care providers or more savings. They express deeply held fears that the end result will be a negative shift in costs to seniors, and a conversion of Medicare into a voucher program in which seniors would get a fixed government contribution and in turn would be told to choose a health plan they can afford.

For all the talk about strengthening Medicare for the future, seniors around this great nation are concluding that the ultimate goal is to undermine Medicare by forcing seniors into private insurance and HMOs for drug coverage.

Now is the time to provide a Medicare prescription drug benefit. Democrats are ready, willing and able to provide seniors with a benefit they desperately need. Our colleagues on the opposite of the aisle need to roll up their sleeves and work with us. We owe a debt of gratitude to seniors who have helped to make America great and strong. The least we can do is deliver on our commitment to help keep them healthy by providing a prescription drug benefit.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO: JIM AND HELEN BERNAL

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 19, 2002

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the time to honor Jim and Helen Bernal of Fruita, Colorado for the unrelenting service they have given to their community. The Bernal family resided in Colorado long before the state had been admitted into the Union, part of a proud legacy spanning eight generations. For their part, Mr. and Mrs. Bernal have been committed to making the town of Fruita a better place to live. –Married 48 years ago in Antonito, Colorado, Jim and Helen have displayed great teamwork, working together and accomplishing tasks that many would deem impossible. Jim and Helen Bernal have raised eight children, and have 29 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Although they may have an eventful home life on their 600-acre farm just outside of Fruita, the couple remains busy with a variety of different projects.

Jim and Helen Bernal are part of a fourteen member board that is working to finance and build a community center in Fruita, Colorado. Working diligently to utilize any resources that might further their cause, the couple has placed recycling barrels around the community to help raise money for the project. They have also organized and participated in a variety of fundraising events that have raised a total of $57,000. Jim Bernal is also an avid drummer, and his band performs several times a month for senior citizens in nearby communities. Always ready to lend a helping hand, Helen serves as the coordinator and booking agent for the band.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great privilege that I recognize Jim and Helen Bernal before this body Congress and this nation today. The Bernals have been widely praised throughout the community for their optimism and determination and I am proud to join in that admiration for such an inspirational couple. Thank you, Jim and Helen, and please keep up your good work.