

the firefighters who respond to catastrophic Federal emergencies like we recently experienced in California.

I want the firefighters to have constant monitoring about their health. I want them to be able to have access to health care that they deserve. That is what my bill will do.

At least 15 studies have shown statistical links between brain cancer and firefighting. According to the Center to Protect Workers' Rights, firefighters often jeopardize their health when they respond to disaster. Often these disasters are so severe that their equipment cannot even protect them. The health consequences for these firefighters can be as great as cancer or heart disease.

In nearly all of these instances where firefighters have responded to Federal disaster, they have often been provided with very little or no health monitoring. This is wrong, and we must change it to make sure that there is monitoring.

Firefighters risk their lives protecting our property, our families, our way of life. They deserve better. We must have more resources devoted to monitoring firefighters after they respond to Federal emergencies when there is prolonged exposure to dangerous smoke, fumes, and chemicals.

A program like this was developed after the collapse of the World Trade Center. It has been very successful in identifying the health problems of those first responders.

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Many of these firefighters at the World Trade Center suffered serious coughing illness after dealing with the wreckage of the towers. Thanks to monitoring programs, we can evaluate the health of these fire responders and get them the care that they need.

I want early detection for the men and women who responded to fires in California. I want them to be able to go back to their families safe and healthy. We must make sure that our firefighters are safe and healthy after they respond to a Federal disaster. We must make sure that we decrease such possible risk.

We owe a great gratitude to these brave men and women who fought the recent fires in California and the Inland Empire. Providing them adequate health care is the least we can do to say thanks to these American heroes.

ROOTING OUT WASTE, FRAUD AND ABUSE IN GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KING of Iowa). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, my Washington Waste Watcher colleagues and I, Republican members of the freshman class, have come to the floor tonight to devise new and innovative ways for trimming the fat out of government. I believe we owe it to the

American taxpayer to hold Washington bureaucrats accountable for wasteful spending and to discover new ways for reducing fraud in government at all levels. A great American from Ellijay, Georgia, Mr. Joe McCutchen, reminds me of this at least once a month.

Mr. Speaker, after spending 28 years as an OB-GYN doctor, it should be no surprise that part of my legislative agenda is to reorganize and revamp this Medicare program, which is currently responsible for billions of dollars of waste, fraud and abuse. The General Accounting Office has estimated that one of every 10 dollars is wasted because our current Medicare system is open to poor management and fraud. Dishonest individuals find new and more creative ways to cheat our Medicare system every day, burdening Americans with higher taxes, higher premiums, and higher copays.

For example, according to the Bureau of National Affairs in an April 25, 2003, article of "Health Care Daily," a Florida woman was sentenced for her role in a scheme that allegedly billed Medicare and Medicaid more than \$25 million worth of false claims for, get this, wheelchairs, alternating pressure mattresses, and other durable medical equipment; \$25 million of taxpayer money that is lost and unrefundable, money that could have been used to improve our schools or aid our soldiers in Iraq or provide health care for the uninsured.

Another example comes from the Health and Human Services Inspector General report to Congress, April 2000. It was reported that Medicare paid an estimated \$20.6 million for services that started after the posted death dates of certain recipients. My good friend and colleague, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE), just a few minutes earlier mentioned the same thing. Of this amount, \$8 million was paid, despite the fact the Department had already noted their deaths in the main database.

These are just examples of the mismanagement of time and resources that are costing Americans billions of dollars every year. In these times of war and emphasis on homeland security, we cannot afford to spend another dollar on wasteful programs, and we must save money by eradicating fraud against and within the Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to restore responsibility and accountability to government programs by rooting out this waste, fraud and abuse in our government. I urge my colleagues to help pass needed Medicare reform.

REPUBLICAN EFFORT TO PRIVATIZE GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, I rise to discuss something I believe goes vir-

tually unsaid in this institution every day, not merely the ramifications of what Congress does on a daily basis, but rather the underlying intentions of those in the majority. And that is how this majority, in concert with the administration, is acting to remake how our Nation governs and thinks of itself. Indeed, it is remaking the very role of government itself.

I think it is particularly appropriate that we discuss this matter at a time when Congress is heading toward its annual appropriations endgame, when many of the most important budgetary decisions affecting millions of citizens are being made behind closed doors by a handful in this Republican majority. So this week I am going to be talking about Republican efforts to privatize functions that are currently the responsibility of government and specifically how that relates to our failure to meet public commitments.

Let me be clear: the goal is not more government. Far from it. In most cases, we want our business enterprises and the market to flourish. But there are some very important areas where we want community values, not the market, to prevail or to set limits on behavior. There is a reason we have public schools, environmental regulation, and retirement programs, because there are things we want to ensure for all individuals, whatever their station in life or wherever they live in the country.

For nearly 75 years, our approach to government has reflected the idea that our society can act with a shared sense of purpose and responsibility to address tasks before our country. But it is no secret that this leadership has some very different ideas about the role of the Federal Government and helping us meet those challenges. Accordingly, the budget Republicans put forward earlier this year was designed simply and efficiently to destroy the capacity and obligation of the government to provide key social support. Their plans are to debase the quality of public services so much that citizens will give up and turn, out of necessity, to the private market.

The examples are many, and they are far-reaching. The twin pillars of our retirement security safety net, Social Security and Medicare, environmental protection, transportation safety, education, all public commitments historically the responsibility of the Federal Government, all undermined by this administration and majority.

Republicans pass legislation to create new tests and higher standards for public schools, then support a budget that cuts the funding to enforce those standards by \$8 billion, in effect guaranteeing failure and providing a justification for the shift to vouchers and private education.

Their Medicare plans offer prescription drug coverage for seniors, but moves seniors into the private insurance market and into HMOs for their Medicare coverage. The budget cuts

coverage for Medicare at the same time the administration reduces hospital reimbursements, denies beneficiaries information on coverage and limits rights of appeal on denial of coverage. All are part of a concerted effort to turn Medicare into essentially a Third World health program for seniors. They want to privatize Medicare.

The story with Medicaid, child care, Head Start, and job training is little different. They propose to turn these programs into block grants for States, offering less and less funding. They say they are offering Governors flexibility; but considering the fiscal crises our States are experiencing, this becomes flexibility only in deciding how to cut services, the flexibility to decide which recipients to jettison.

As a Member of the Committee on the Budget, I was privy earlier this year to witness Republicans on the committee taking the breathtaking step of instructing other congressional committees to cut Federal mandatory programs by \$98 billion, in effect an instruction to reduce benefits and to limit eligibility. If it had been successful, it would have forced the government to cut funding, but not to end the commitment that we have in each of these areas.

So although America has committed itself to helping disabled veterans, to providing loans for college education, to offering school lunches to children and providing school assistance, housing and health care to families, the government would have been forced to breach those commitments and those contracts.

Now as we near the appropriations end game, we are seeing the impact of these budgetary sleights of hand. For example, last week we saw the imminent privatization of 69 air traffic control towers. This despite the fact we have the most productive and safest air traffic control system in the world.

Or "worker efficiency studies" at Department of the Interior designed to justify the shift of public jobs to private corporations, the results of which studies have been dubious, to say the least. We have spent \$16 million in outsourcing studies at the Bureau of Land Management that have generated \$600,000 in savings; \$18.6 million in outsourcing studies at the Forest Service that found that 47 out of 1,000 jobs studied should be handed over to private contractors. The only waste of public funds found in these studies was their own price tags.

And these are but two examples of Republicans seeking to establish that citizens cannot depend on public commitments—even ones that embody America's shared values about service to country, opportunity and help for those most in need.

The time has come to call them out on this bait-and-switch maneuver—to fight this initiative and promote the capacity of our country to act together on our shared values. And so I look forward to further special orders in the coming days and weeks on this subject, and invite colleagues on both sides of the aisle to

join me in this discussion. I think it will be a very enlightening one, indeed.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue over the next several days and several weeks to talk about how this administration and this majority is not about cutting one program after another, but, in fact, starving the Federal Government of the resources it needs in order to meet its public commitments.

CUTTING BENEFITS FOR VETERANS

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

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, soon we will be observing Veterans' Day in our Nation; and there will be parades, pictures will be taken, and flowery speeches will be made. But I want to just point out to my colleagues here in the House and to those who may be watching what the record is in terms of veterans and veterans funding and veterans health care.

In 2002, the Veterans Administration decided that they were going to raise the cost of a prescription drug that a veteran would have to pay from \$2 to \$7 a prescription. At the time I thought that was outrageous, because many of the veterans that I represent take 10 or more prescriptions a month; and I felt like that was an unnecessary burden, financial burden, to place upon our veterans.

But there is a pattern of actions that have been taken by this administration that I think I would call shameful as far as the treatment of veterans is concerned, because following this increase in the cost of a prescription drug, the VA issued a gag order. They literally changed VA policy. They sent out a memo that went out to all the health care providers across our country, the doctors and nurses and social workers who work in our VA clinics, and they forbade them to continue to proactively inform veterans of what benefits they were legally entitled to receive. The memo was very specific. It told these health care providers that they could no longer participate in a community health fair, they could no longer send out newsletters informing veterans of the benefits that they were entitled to, they could no longer make public service announcements.

Now, think of that. Here is this agency of the Federal Government, under this President, an agency that is supposed to be looking out for the welfare of veterans, literally forbidding the health care providers in our VA facilities from informing veterans in a proactive manner of the benefits they were entitled to receive under the law.

Well, not long after they issued this gag order, the VA made a decision that they were going to exclude an entire group of veterans from VA health care. They called this new category of veterans Priority 8. You can be a Priority 8 veteran and be a combat-decorated

veteran; but if you have an illness that is not service-connected and if your income is deemed to be too much, and in this case it can be as little as \$24,000 a year, you are told by the VA, you are out of here. We do not want you coming to us for medical care. You are excluded. You are a Priority 8 veteran. Pretty pathetic. All of this is happening, by the way, under the Presidency of George W. Bush.

Then in January the President sent his budget to the Congress, and in his budget he asked that the cost of a prescription drug be increased from \$7 to \$15 a prescription. Think of that. At a time when we were getting ready to send our young men and women into war, the President wants to increase the copayment for a prescription from \$7 to \$15. His budget also asked that a new first-time enrollment fee be imposed upon veterans, Priority 7 and 8 veterans, an enrollment fee of \$250.

You can see the pattern. It is a pattern of neglect and, I believe, abuse of veterans.

Then we could talk about the disabled veterans tax. The country is becoming aware that if a veteran has served 20 years, he or she is entitled to a retirement benefit; and if they are injured as a result of their military service, they are entitled to disability benefits, but they cannot receive both.

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But they cannot receive both. Now, if they were in any other part of the Federal Government, they would get both. But if you are a veteran, for every dollar in disability benefit you get, you lose a dollar in pension. In other words, veterans are being required to fund their own disability compensation. We tried to correct that in the House and Senate, but the President put out a veto threat that if this was in the bill, if this correction was in the bill, he would veto it.

Then there is a matter of VA funding for this year. It is \$1.8 billion short of what this House promised. We need \$1.8 billion additional dollars in VA funding simply to maintain the current level of VA health care services, but the Republican leadership and the President say no. So the Senate, just last week, passed an amendment to increase VA funding, not by the full \$1.8 billion, but by \$1.3 billion, and they wanted to take it out of that \$87 billion that is being provided for Iraq. The same day, the White House put out a statement saying they oppose this.

I think the veterans of this country are coming to understand that they are being treated in a shabby and a shameless manner.

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

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