

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I regret I was unavoidably detained and missed the three votes earlier today.

Had I been present, I would have voted in the following manner: rollcall 656, approving H.R. 1904, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, I would have voted "nay."

On rollcall 657, approving H.R. 453, I would have voted "yea."

On rollcall 658, approving S. 1156, I would have voted "yea."

□ 1530

REPORT ON RESOLUTION WAIVING POINTS OF ORDER AGAINST CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 1, MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG, IMPROVEMENT, AND MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2003

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 108-394) on the resolution (H. Res. 463) waiving points of order against the conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 1) to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for a voluntary program for prescription drug coverage under the Medicare Program, to modernize the Medicare Program, to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a deduction to individuals for amounts contributed to health savings security accounts and health savings accounts, to provide for the disposition of unused health benefits in cafeteria plans and flexible spending arrangements, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

WAIVING REQUIREMENT OF CLAUSE 6(a) OF RULE XIII WITH RESPECT TO CONSIDERATION OF CERTAIN RESOLUTIONS

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 459 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 459

Resolved, That the requirement of clause 6(a) of rule XIII for a two-thirds vote to consider a report from the Committee on Rules on the same day it is presented to the House is waived with respect to any resolution reported on the legislative day of November 21, 2003, providing for consideration or disposition of a conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 1) to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for a voluntary program for prescription drug coverage under the Medicare Program, to modernize the Medicare Program, to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a deduction to individuals for amounts contributed to health savings security accounts and health savings accounts, to provide for the disposition of unused health benefits in cafeteria plans and flexible spending arrangements, and for other purposes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BASS). The gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) is recognized for 1 hour.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Committee on Rules met and passed this resolution waiving clause 6(a) of rule XIII, requiring a two-thirds vote to consider a rule on the same day it is reported from the Committee on Rules against certain resolutions reported from the Committee on Rules. The resolution applies the waiver to a special rule reported on or before the legislative day of Friday, November 21, 2003, providing for consideration or disposition of the conference report to accompany the bill, H.R. 1, the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues are aware, the conference committee has completed its work and the conference report has been filed. In the spirit of bipartisanship to accommodate the request of the minority, the Committee on Rules met this morning, as opposed to last night, to give members of the minority an opportunity to come to the Committee on Rules at a convenient time and so that the witnesses could come to the Committee on Rules at a convenient time to talk about this extraordinarily important conference report which delivers to America's seniors a voluntary, universal, and guaranteed prescription drug benefit.

This morning, the Committee on Rules received testimony for more than 4 hours on this conference report from many Members in anticipation of reporting a rule to bring this very important and historic legislation before the House. Adoption of this same-day rule and a subsequent rule will simply allow us to consider the historic prescription drug and Medicare modernization plan today, hopefully moving us one day closer to sending this measure to the President of the United States for his signature and sending a strong message to the American people that this Congress is committed to ensuring our seniors that they have access to affordable medications that will keep them healthy and active.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to support this rule and allow the House to complete its work on this landmark legislation. America's seniors have waited far too long. It is time for us to act.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio for yielding me the customary 30 minutes, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Ms. SLAUGHTER asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, the rules of this body require that before

considering a conference report, a copy of the report and the joint explanatory statement must be available to Members for 3 business days. The Medicare drug conference report and accompanying explanatory statement were filed very early this morning, 1:17 a.m. But here we are, Mr. Speaker, debating a special rule waiving the House rule prohibiting the same-day consideration of the Medicare conference report that is more than 1,000 pages long. This defies common sense. This tramples on the rights of the Members of this body. How are we to make the best informed decisions for our constituents and the Nation about monumental legislation when we do not have the required opportunity to examine this report? What should be bipartisan conference committees are, in fact, clandestine meetings held behind closed doors. Democratic House Members were deliberately excluded from the conference committee. The only African Americans on the Committee on Ways and Means were banned from a place at the negotiating table speaking for our African American citizens. That included the ranking member of the Committee on Ways and Means, who was appointed to the conference by the Speaker of the House. Key policy bargains were made out of sight of Members and hidden from public inspection.

What is it that we and the American people are not supposed to see in the fine print? Does this plan hand billions of dollars to the wealthy drug companies and insurance industry? Does this plan hurt seniors more than it helps? Will seniors end up paying more and receiving less? What will the impact be on minority seniors? They were not represented at the table. Is this bill a Trojan horse of privatizing and dismantling Medicare? If this bill is the answer to seniors' cries for help combating the skyrocketing prices charged for medications, why are we not allowed to carefully review the hundreds of pages of this report? News reports and a quick glance at the bill indicate that nothing is done to freeze or control out-of-control drug prices.

Just this morning, Thomas Scully, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, told a senior Member of the other body that he misunderstood this plan and needs to read the bill. That is a wonderful suggestion, Mr. Speaker. Too bad that we will not have that chance as the Senate has. Medicare is much too precious to kill because we will never, ever in our lifetimes and probably anybody else's in my voice's range be able to institute another program like this in America.

I remind my colleagues of the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act which was passed without providing Members and seniors sufficient opportunity to read the pages and pages of fine print. The result was a momentous backlash. American seniors were outraged by the legislation, so outraged that Congress was forced to repeal the law the very next year.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER), chairman of the Committee on Rules.

(Mr. DREIER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this rule, and obviously we at this moment have begun the debate on what is clearly one of the most important issues that we will face in our entire careers here. We all know that 38 years ago the Medicare program was established, and it has met the very important needs of many retirees, many of our seniors. But we are also well aware of the fact that there have been more than a few problems with the Medicare program, and for years and years and years people have talked about bringing about reform of Medicare. There has been a lot of talk; and in just a few hours, we are going to finally have an opportunity to vote "yes" on this conference report which will effectively address many of those concerns which have existed for many, many years.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, that this measure will include a number of other very important items. Back in 1987, I had the privilege of introducing in this House legislation calling for the establishment of what we then called MSA, medical savings accounts, the opportunity for people to put dollars aside, tax deductible, so that they could plan for their future health care needs purchasing either health insurance or direct health benefits. Health needs that they had could be addressed with those dollars. We have already proceeded with bipartisan support in putting into place pilot programs, and there has been a great deal of success. Why? Because it does help diminish the demand for Federal programs by allowing people to again privately plan and privately save with some incentive as they look toward those health care needs in the future.

We also, Mr. Speaker, with this plan are doing something that is unprecedented, and it is a need which Democrats and Republicans alike have said needs to be met. We know that in the last Presidential campaign, both Vice President Al Gore, who was a candidate, and now President George Bush, when he was a candidate, talked about the need to ensure that we for our seniors provide an opportunity for them to have access to affordable prescription drugs. One of the things that is often said, our majority leader points it out, I have said it for a long period of time, 38 years ago when the Medicare program was established, the only prescription drug available was that doctors would say, "Take two aspirin and call me in the morning." We know that if today we were putting into place a Medicare program, there would clearly be a prescription drug

component included in that program. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I believe we are taking this very bold and important step to enhance the availability of prescription drugs for our retirees.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, we know that we included \$400 billion in our budget, but there are many who have projected that this program could in fact spiral out of control, that it could become another massive new entitlement program which would get us into a great deal of fiscal trouble for the future. That is why I am very pleased at the direction of the Speaker, who, as we all know, has been intimately involved in working on health care issues for years.

He was very involved, of course, in the medical savings account issue earlier. He has headed task forces on this issue. He instructed me and my colleagues on the Committee on Rules to work on a cost-containment vehicle that would help us take steps to diminish the prospects of having this program spiral out of control so that there would be a degree of accountability here in this institution. That is why I say, Mr. Speaker, this legislation that we are going to be voting on later this evening includes this unprecedented cost-containment requirement that will ensure the fiscal integrity of Medicare for more than just a generation of Americans.

The legislation protects Medicare in two ways. First, it instructs the Medicare trustees to keep a constant vigil over the ebbs and flows of revenues in their different systems. We need that kind of monitoring mechanism to make sure that the programs are working and to make sure that the cost stays within our expectations. More important than that, Mr. Speaker, however, this legislation defends against the creation of another out-of-control entitlement program. As Members know, this is one of the most serious and debilitating and unintended consequences of the good intentions of so many of our programs here, that the costs run way, way beyond what are anticipated. There are already too many entitlement programs, we know, over which we have very little or, in fact, no fiscal control. We know them as mandatory programs. This legislation is different because it sets up an early warning system that alerts us to unexpected and unintended spending increases and gives us a mechanism for applying the brakes if spending is driven out of control by events and circumstances we could not have foreseen. Under this legislation, the Medicare trustees are required to notify the Congress if 45 percent or more of Medicare outlays are predicted to be funded through general revenue.

□ 1545

Two such notifications in consecutive years require both Presidential and congressional action. Within 15 days of his annual budget submission, the President then has to propose legis-

lation to resolve the funding difficulties. Continuing under expedited procedures, the House then has 3 legislative days to introduce the measure, and any such legislation introduced on the President's behalf, or any legislation introduced by a Member with the same purpose, must be certified by the chairman of the Committee on the Budget to ensure that it adequately address the problem.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, it would be easy for some in Congress to take the path of least resistance and let the difficult solutions die in the committee process. I want to underscore to the Members that this legislation does not allow that to happen. It does not allow us to just push it off to the committee process. By July 30 of any year after a Medicare Funding Warning is issued, it is in order, under this legislation's special provisions, to move to discharge any committee that is holding up any legitimate attempt to address the funding gap. The motion to discharge would be in order with the support of one-fifth, one-fifth, of the House Members; that is, 87 Members can stand up.

After the legislation has been discharged, the measure would have to be considered on the floor within 3 days and must result in a vote. Mr. Speaker, this mechanism ensures that we are not going to in any way abrogate our constitutional duty to watch over the Federal Treasury even in the case of what is considered to be entitlement spending.

I want to congratulate the gentleman from North Carolina (Mrs. MYRICK), my Committee on Rules colleague, for working very closely with us on this issue, and I believe that taking this step, putting this mechanism into place which has never been put in place before, to help us ensure that we do not see the spending spiral out of control will go a long way towards addressing the need of making sure that we have a prescription drug program for our seniors and at the same time making sure that we do it in a fiscally responsible way. We do have a very unique opportunity ahead of us, and again I want to congratulate the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker HASTERT) for the vision that he has shown on this, the fact that we have worked in a bipartisan way.

And I want to say that as we proceed with work on the same-day rule and the rule that will allow for consideration of the conference report, we want to ensure that every Member has an opportunity to be heard. We will have an hour on this rule, an hour on the second rule, and then the traditional hour on the conference report; and we have been working on an arrangement which will allow an opportunity to at least double the amount of time on the conference report.

So I believe we have a very good measure here. I think that it is deserving of strong bipartisan support since both Democrats and Republicans have consistently said that we do need to

address this need of both reforming Medicare and at the same time making sure that seniors have access to affordable prescription drugs.

So I thank my friend for yielding me this time for me to provide this explanation for our colleagues, and we look forward to strong passage of this rule, the next rule, and the conference report itself.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I feel compelled to say that two-thirds of this bill could have been paid for by the money that the United States owes the Medicare Trust Fund today, \$270 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), ranking member of Committee on Ways and Means, who stood at the door and knocked.

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the chairman of the Committee on Rules for the splendid job he has done in explaining, as he sees it, a 1,000-page bill to this House, and why we should shove this down the throats of the Members of the House of Representatives without being privy to what he is privy to.

I do not know how in the world anybody can get to this well and say we are talking about a bipartisan bill when they had the Sergeant of Arms blocking out Democrats from the House from getting anywhere near the preparation of this bill.

Some people claim that they know what is in it. The eloquence of the chairman of the Committee on Rules was overwhelming. Why will he not allow the rest of the House to take a look at this 1,000-page bill so that they can be just as eloquent as he.

Let me tell the Members one thing. There are people in this House today that believe that in that 1,000-page bill is a plan to eliminate completely the Medicare system as we know it.

I know that you know better.

There are people here that really believe this is a payoff to the pharmaceuticals, to the HMOs, and even some of the folks that run around saying they represent old folks.

I know you know better.

There are people who truly believe that employees and retirees are going to lose out in this bill.

Republicans know better, but they want to keep it a secret. It is a Republican thing. Democrats not invited.

All we are saying is you put this bill together yourselves. You think you know what is the best for the Nation. You believe that Democrats have no contribution to make, whether they belong to the Congressional Black Caucus, you do not have one; the Hispanic Caucus; you do not have one; the non-existent Jewish caucus, you have got one. No matter what you have got, you really believe that we have to be excluded until you decide what is best for us.

You know something, you just may be right. All we are asking for is let us

have a day to take a look at it. Let us see what makes you right. Let us see why all of these people are calling us every day say that you are wrong, and you are trying to kill the system. Tell us why would you not let into the conference the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL), the son of the author of the Medicare bill, the dean of the House of Representatives? Why is it that you believe that he would have nothing to offer to this bill? All I am saying is that you know what is in the bill. Give the House of Representatives, not the Republicans, not the Democrats, but the people's House, give us a chance to see what we truly believe is going to be good for the American people and our seniors. If you do that, maybe you are right. If you are afraid, you will not give us any more time.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

This bill has been online on the Committee on Ways and Means Web site and the Committee on Rules Web site since last night. This is no secret to anyone, least of all the American public, and anyone is free to look it up and read it at their leisure.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), my friend and colleague of the Committee on Rules.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I would like to say something about the rule. It is a fair rule. It is a rule that was used often as long as I have been here toward the end of a session to get pieces of legislation to the floor. The rule gives an extra hour for those opposing this bill to argue about it, and we are going to hear lots of arguing and lots of whining. But in the event we get through this rule and the rule on Medicare reformation and get to the bill, I think the public is going to know an awful lot about what is in it. Frankly, the substance of this agreement was known last Sunday, several days ago. And the 3-day rule layover that we are avoiding this time is normal for the end of year.

I just want to make one comment about something that I heard twice in a 4-hour hearing today in the Committee on Rules, and we will hear it later on the floor. On two occasions, it was said that former Speaker Gingrich said in a speech to the Blue Cross organization, or Blue Shield, that he wanted Medicare to wither on the vine. That was made into a commercial by AFL-CIO and run across the country. And Brooks Jackson on July 15, 1996, did an expose on that. He showed the entire speech, and he showed that what they had done was cut up a piece. What Newt Gingrich was talking about was not Medicare or its beneficiaries, but the bureaucracy that runs it. He said that given the opportunity to make free choices, our seniors will voluntarily, voluntarily, opt out of the Health Care Financing Administration, and it will wither on the vine. When Brooks Jackson did that expose, he

said what the unions were doing was dishonest.

I want to make this point before the debate starts because I want you to know that we know that you know you are dishonest.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL).

Mr. PASCRELL. Mr. Speaker, I just heard the epitome of hypocrisy from the gentleman from California when he tried to interrupt the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) and he would not let the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) into the room and the likes of the leadership. If this is not hypocrisy, what is? The movie "Thelma and Louise," watch it. Louise turns to Thelma and says "You get what you settle for." And how right she was.

This prescription drug bill is the worst example of accepting what we are given. The administration is telling seniors that they should settle. They have convinced that the AARP that they are getting half a loaf, which is, of course, better than no bread at all. But, seniors, beware. They are not getting a slice even, they are not getting a half a loaf. These are the crumbs off the table. Our seniors will be settling for crumbs while the special interests are getting fat, and are they happy this week.

Today, the leaders on the other side are here to try to pass a bill that provides a weak prescription drug benefit, that fails to lower drug costs because the bill prohibits the government to try to help negotiate down the cost of the drugs. They specifically put that into the legislation. And it privatizes Medicare. It changes Medicare as we know it, pushing millions of seniors into HMOs. And this is fiscally irresponsible. Do the Members know what HMOs have done in New Jersey? They have shoved 79,000 people out of those HMOs since 1999. That is what awaits our seniors.

You cannot ignore that. Democrats have led the charge for years to add a prescription drug benefit, but we are not going to settle. We will compromise. We will discuss, but at least invite us to the table to compromise. This is America, not the Soviet Union.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from the great State of Texas (Mr. SESSIONS), my friend and colleague from the Committee on Rules.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) for yielding me this time.

There is a lot of talk today about what is occurring with procedures and whether it is right or wrong, but I want to stand up today and talk about the bill. I want to talk about the bill and the things that it does for not only families like mine, but also for millions of other families across this great Nation.

What this bill does is it modernizes Medicare and so much more because it

then gets into health care for families. It talks about the opportunity for families to be able to save money on a pretax and tax-free basis. Why is that important to my family? That is important to me because I have got a beautiful wife of 19 years, I have got a son who is 14 years old, who plays football and wrestles, and he sometimes gets hurt, and I have a 9-year-old Down's syndrome son who spends an extensive amount of time needing help with physicians and health care professionals. Not always do we get an answer back from the insurance company that they want to cover the needs of my family. Sometimes the needs of my family go well beyond those needs of what insurance pays for. But my family, like millions of other families, will now be helped because of the extreme generosity of the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS) and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. TAUZIN) who have written a bill that will allow families to save up to \$5,000 a year. Even if it is just \$2,000 a year, if that is what we have got left over, then we can put that money in there, and it means that this money can grow, tax free, and then be used, tax free, on health care. It means that my family and myself will now be able to supplement those things that may not be covered under our health care. It means that we will be able to be decision-makers to get the right things if we need something that goes beyond what insurance pays for.

I cannot tell the Members how important that is because there are millions of other families that are less fortunate than mine who many times go without the ability to have the services that are necessary for their children.

□ 1600

This is a way that people can help. They can help their children. They can help their families. They can make sure that they supplement those things that insurance provides, and that is good.

We have heard today that all this is about is about rich people or about rich organizations. Let me tell my colleagues, when you have someone who is sick or hurt in your family and you find out that insurance does not cover everything you need, and then you look at the tab that is out there, you will look and say, thank goodness for what Republicans have done.

I am proud of what this bill does. It modernizes health care today the way it ought to be, where we can participate, where we can do the right things. So I am proud of what the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) is standing up for today, to stand for this House to confirm this rule, to make sure that this Republican body can deliver to Americans and their families and senior citizens not only the health care that they need, but as a result of listening to what people need, we will deliver prescription drugs and those things that America has been asking for.

And then we will have a President who will sign this bill and do the right thing. And in the scheme of things, us doing the right things to help people today and to make sure families can be prepared for tomorrow is part of the oath and obligation that I took when I said I will support and defend this Constitution and make sure that the people I represent get the best from what we can come up with.

Mr. Speaker, I support this rule. I support this bill. I encourage every single Member to think about what this is about. It is not about politics. It is not about ourselves. It is about our families, our children, and our future.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE).

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the gentleman from Texas is proud of this legislation, but I want to tell him, I am ashamed of this legislation, and I am ashamed of what we are about to do; and I hope we do not do it.

Secondly, he said his constituents are going to be helped. They are not going to be helped; they are going to be hurt. When he says this is a good bill, it is not a good bill; it is a bad bill. My constituents are calling, the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) said his constituents are calling, and they are calling me because they are scared to death about what you are going to do, because they think that Medicare is going to die, to disappear and that they are not going to get any kind of decent prescription drug benefit.

Let me tell my colleagues why they are right. There is no question that you are not going to get any kind of drug benefit under this bill unless you go private. You have to join an HMO. If you do not join an HMO and lose your choice of doctor or your choice of hospital, then you are not going to get the drug benefit. They are scared, because they do not want to do that. They do not want to have to trade and lose their doctor in order to get some kind of drug benefit.

Secondly, they are upset because there is no benefit here. There is nothing here for them to benefit from. They are going to have to pay more out, shell more out of their pocket than they are going to get back in terms of a prescription drug benefit. If we look at what this bill does, first of all, we do not know what the premium is going to be. You might have a premium of \$75, \$85 month. You have to pay a deductible of \$275 a month. After you pay out \$2,200, for the next \$3,000 or so, you get no benefit at all, no drug benefit. You have to pay 100 percent out-of-pocket while you continue to pay probably a very high premium.

So they figure, I am going to lose my choice of doctor. I may lose my choice of hospital. And at the same time, I am not getting any benefit because of this doughnut hole and what you are causing me to pay out.

Then they say, they are expecting there is going to be some kind of con-

trols on the price of prescription drugs, but you have a clause in the bill that says that we cannot even negotiate price. So the costs of prescription drugs will continue to rise, as all of these other terrible things are happening.

Then they say, my constituents say to me, Congressman, is it true that this bill does not even take effect until 2006 with the drug benefit? The answer is yes. That is what the bill says. Read the bill: 2006 before the drug benefit kicks in. You know what my constituents say? That is a joke. What kind of a joke is this? You are going to have some election in 2004 and then you are all going to run for election and say what a great thing this is and this is not even going to kick in. They want a prescription drug benefit now. Why can it not start January 1 of 2004?

Lastly, the reason they are really scared is because of the privatization. I heard the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) say "privatize" three times. That is what this is all about: privatizing, not just the prescription drug benefit, but Medicare as a whole. Because even though we are only going to have these demonstration programs in certain parts of the country, the bottom line is they are going to impact the whole country and ultimately, by the year 2010, you are going to force people to take a voucher, try to go out in the private sector and buy their Medicare as a whole, and if they cannot find it or they do not like what they are offering for that voucher, that set amount of money, then they are not going to be able to stay in traditional Medicare, fee-for-service Medicare.

Privatize Medicare, privatize the drug benefit, it does not even start until 2006, and you lose your doctor. That is why they are scared to death.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I must take 1 minute to say that the gentleman has misspoken. Our most needy seniors, the seniors who need it most will be getting help with their prescription drugs, the best tool medicine has to offer, by next spring if we pass this bill. But if we delay, if we continue to defeat our efforts, the Republican efforts to bring prescription drugs to the American people, we will never provide them help. We have to start and we have to pass this bill today.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY), someone who should know a lot about this.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio for yielding me this time, and I promise to tone down the rhetoric just for a couple of minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the rule for the Medicare agreement. Today, we face a Medicare reality, a reality that requires change, reform, and willing leadership.

Though not a perfect solution, the Medicare agreement is a big step in the right direction, a step in the right direction by providing our seniors with

assistance to pay for the rising cost of prescription medications, medications that will help them live longer and help their lives; a step in the right direction by supplying appropriate reimbursement updates for hospitals, and updates to ensure that hospitals sustain the ability to provide needed goods and quality services for their patients; a step in the right direction by blocking the proposed cut in Medicare reimbursements to physicians and, instead, provide a positive update, reimbursements that will allow physicians to properly serve their patients and curb the trend of reduced access.

I urge my colleagues to take this step to help our seniors, our hospitals, and our physicians and adopt this rule so we can pass the Medicare conference report.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN).

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time.

I rise in strong opposition to the proposed rule to consider the Medicare Modernization and Prescription Drug Act of 2003. We are about to vote on legislation that will have an enormous impact on every single American. While we know very little about the details, since we were only given this bill late last night, what we do know is that it offers a completely inadequate drug benefit, does nothing to contain the rapidly increasing cost of prescription drugs, and takes steps toward privatizing Medicare. When our seniors find out about the truth of what this bill will do to their health plans, they will be outraged. This is shameful, because it does not have to be this way.

We are poised to make the most significant changes to Medicare in history, and we are proposing to vote on it while the ink is still drying, a 600-page bill that we have scarcely been able to read. This is no way to make good public policy.

Mr. Speaker, as President Woodrow Wilson once said, "Whenever any business affecting the public is conducted, wherever any plans affecting the public are laid, over that place a voice must speak with the divine prerogative of the people's will the words 'let there be light.'" Mr. Speaker, there is no light in our work here today, and the Members of this House and the people that we represent deserve better.

I urge all of my colleagues, regardless of their position on this bill, to vote against this rule.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO).

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time.

Would every Member who is on the floor and who has read all 691 pages of this bill since it was made available at

1:30 in the morning please raise your hand. I do not see any hands raised, but we are going to vote on it very soon. We are not doing a service to the American public by violating the rules of the House and not allowing this bill to be held over for 3 days, as required by the rules, so Members of Congress, and maybe even members of the public and the fourth estate, could read it, analyze it, and report it so we could better hear the opinion of the American people. But from what I know of it and the bits I have read, it is not much of a benefit, and it is not what seniors need.

Americans pay more for U.S. manufactured, FDA-approved drugs than anybody else in the world. Our neighbors in Canada pay half as much, on average, for drugs manufactured in the United States of America. Now, how could that be? Well, the government of Canada bargains lower prices on behalf of Canadians. Well, maybe that would be a solution to the problem here in the United States: let us lower the extortionate price of drugs. Let us put the 40 million people in Medicare into a buying group, that would not cost anything, and let us negotiate lower prices. No.

This bill, at the behest of the pharmaceutical industry, a generous contributor to the Republican Party and the President, prohibits the Government of the United States of America, unlike any other industrial nation or democracy on Earth, from negotiating lower drug prices for its citizens with these multinational conglomerate pharmaceutical companies. There is no pain for the pharmaceutical industry in this bill. In fact, their stock has gone up dramatically in the last week. The analysts have read it, and they said, what a sweet deal for the pharmaceutical industry. Too bad it will not give seniors what they need.

Well, there are \$400 billion of taxpayer money, copayments, premiums, deductibles, the doughnut exclusion. There is a nice \$20 billion subsidy to private HMO insurance companies who might or might not offer benefits. But seniors, on average, are going to get a benefit that is less than they could get by mail-ordering their drugs from Canada. Oh.

Well, the bill is going to take care of that problem too. Despite the fact that this House of Representatives is on record by a large margin allowing the free reimportation of U.S.-manufactured, FDA-approved drugs for Americans from other industrialized nations that regulate safely those drugs, this bill is going to begin to block that process. They say, oh, well, that is not in the bill. We give the authority to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to allow the importation if he sees fit. Yes, sure. Except he has already said that he does not see fit and he will never, ever do that; and the FDA commissioner has said oh, no, we are not going to ever do that. We cannot certify that those U.S.-manufac-

ured, FDA-approved drugs that took a little vacation in Canada are safe.

This is simply legislation that is not going to provide the benefits that seniors need at an extraordinary cost to the ultimate detriment of the core Medicare program. Vote "no."

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is absolutely correct. There is no great list of dead Canadians from taking bad medicines.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Washington State (Mr. BAIRD).

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of this debate, the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Rules pointed out that this is one of the most important bills we have faced possibly in our careers. Indeed, he is correct. Yet, we are given less than 24 hours to consider this. The most important bill in our careers, 24 hours to consider it.

It is part of a very troubling pattern, and I call my colleagues' attention to this: in the last 7 legislative days in this Congress, we have either authorized or appropriated more than \$1.26 trillion of the people's money. The defense authorization bill we were given 3 hours to read before the vote. The Medicare bill, we may have a total of about 28 hours, clock hours, if we read around the clock to read this. The intelligence authorization bill, 8 hours. A total of \$1.26 trillion, and we are going to have an omnibus appropriation bill shortly.

I would like to yield, if I may, to the gentlewoman from Ohio. I have asked one of the pages to take her a piece of text from this legislation, and I would like her to explain this to me. If we have had adequate time to study it, then we should know what is in it.

The text reads as follows, and I will invite the gentlewoman to explain what it means.

□ 1615

On page 13, actually of the interpretive paper from the Republican party, it reads, "Plans would be permitted to substitute cost-sharing requirements for costs up to the initial coverage limit that were actuarially consistent with an average expected 25 percent coinsurance for costs up to the initial coverage limit. They could also apply tiered copayment, provided such copayments were actuarially consistent with the average 25 percent cost-sharing requirement."

I yield to the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) to explain what that means.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD) for yielding. This was just put in front of me. I would defer to the chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means or a member of the Committee on Ways and Means because this is their jurisdiction and certainly not the jurisdiction of the Committee on Rules.

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time. I believe the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) has pointed out we have had adequate time to study the legislation. I presume she is going to vote on it. This is a summary provided by her Republican party, yet she fails to be able to explain it.

I would invite anyone here present with us today from the majority party, or who plans to vote from the minority party, to please explain what it is we are voting on. I would invite the next person to offer that explanation.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I will continue to reserve my time. We do not have any more speakers at this point.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, my good friend has really laid it out for us. We are not yet debating the bill. I thank the distinguished gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER) from the Committee on Rules, both of them in fact, we are debating the process. I think it is important because this is historic.

I sat for 2½ hours in the Committee on Rules, and I want to thank the Committee on Rules for giving me the 2½ hours to sit, and then the opportunity to express my opposition and challenges to this legislation. I have been taught as a child that it is all about who shows up. Not about whether you can finish or whether or not you are the best, but who shows up. Who shows up in school, who stays in school.

Let me tell about this legislation and what I went to the Committee on Rules about. I asked them to reserve what we call points or order. Because I believe this bill is fatally flawed. It has killer bees in the midst. It has a lot of roses in it. And people are talking about hospitals and doctors. I am glad to see the American Nurses Association is against this bill. But roses have thorns and thorns make you bleed. And there is a lot of bleeding going on in this bill.

This bill is a subsidy for HMOs and a subsidy, if you will, for prescription drug companies. And as I said, it is all about who shows up. And HMOs do not show up.

Take any city and any county and any State and when an HMO finds out they cannot make a profit, they close up. Take Harris County, 4 years ago, six HMOs, they closed up shop on our seniors because they could not make a profit.

And what does this bill do? It hurts low-income seniors and those who are disabled. I cannot imagine how we would vote for a bill that unravels Medicare by its premium support, even if it is an example program. It gives premium support to defer you over to a private insurance program and leaves Medicare unraveling on the vine.

In addition, it does not take a law graduate to understand what

anticompetitiveness means. We call that antitrust violations. And how can you give benefits to private insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies when you allow them to establish the cost of the drugs, and you do not allow the Federal Government to compete fairly by bringing down the cost of the drugs. Some people say it is dumber than dumb. This is a dumber than dumb plan. We should have the opportunity to take 3 days to review this. This is a dumb plan, a dumb procedure. And, Mr. Speaker, how can you leave Democrats off the conference committee and say this is a good plan.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COOPER).

Mr. COOPER. Mr. Speaker, this is a very sad day for this House. I bring a unique perspective, I think, to this legislation because I represent probably more hospitals than any other Member of this body. Because Nashville, Tennessee, is the headquarters town for most of the for-profit hospitals in America. We also have a leading academic medical center and many non-profit hospitals with some 300 health care companies headquartered in our city. We are Health Care U.S.A.

I have also been a professor of health care policy at Vanderbilt Business School; the last 7 years studying these issues. And in my prior service in Congress, I was one of the leaders in trying to craft bipartisan health care policy, getting Democrats and Republicans to work together, to do the right thing for our Nation's seniors and for all of our citizens.

This bill, which we were finally allowed to see a few short hours ago, is a travesty. First of all, very few, if any, Members really know what is in it. There simply has not been enough time. And our seniors deserve better than a martial law rule. Why not at least the regular 3 days, so Americans can see what is in this bill? What is the other side afraid of? What are they afraid of?

Sunshine is the best policy. Sunshine is the best disinfectant for what may or may not be in this bill.

Now, I had a head start, I have been trying to follow proceedings closely over the last several months of the conference from which all Democrats have been excluded in the House. But I have tried to pick up bits and pieces here or there. I have tried to read everything available on this. And the best I can tell, the policies in this bill come up way short.

Now, our hospitals in Nashville are proud of the 3 to 5 percent of the bill that covers their activities, but the rest of the bill, the other 95 percent, has severe policy shortcomings that I am afraid the other side feels cannot stand the light of day, cannot stand full debate.

So our seniors deserve better, Mr. Speaker. Let us give them a better bill. Let us take the time to do it right.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

And in light of the comments of the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COOPER), the last speaker, I would say that every major hospital association in this Nation is on board with this legislation. He should be supportive of it. Not only the hospital associations, but the American Association of Retired Persons, the AARP, who speaks for every senior in this country. They are on board. The AIDS Institute, the Alzheimer's Association, the Coalition for Medicare Choices, Hepatitis C Global Foundation, International Patient Advocacy Association, Kidney Cancer Association, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the National Council on the Aging, the Seniors Coalition, United Seniors International Association, We Are Family Foundation, Academy of Family Practice Residence Directors, Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care, Alliance to Improve Medicare, American Academy of Dermatology Association, American Academy of Family Practitioners and Physicians, American Academy of Home Care Physicians, American Academy of Neurology, Ophthalmology, Osteopathy, Pharmaceutical Physicians.

Mr. Speaker, this list is pages and pages long. Every significant health care provider, every significant person in this country who is touched by health care and feels the pain of seniors and understands their health care needs is on board with this legislation. Anyone who cares about the future of health care for seniors should be on board as well.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I am interested in the list that the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) read off. I hope that they know what is in the bill, because we sure do not.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS).

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER).

And to the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE), let me assure you that AARP no longer speaks for America's seniors. The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare is the Nation's second largest senior advocacy group. Unlike AARP, they are not in the pharmacy business, and they are not in the discount prescription card business. And Max Richmond, their executive director said what? He said, "You ever heard of Medicare fraud? This Republican prescription drug bill is Medicare fraud." And let me tell you why: It is obscene that the Republicans in Congress would lock the door and refuse to allow the Democratic conferees in the room while this bill was being finalized. If that is not enough, now they are trying to use a parliamentary procedure to immediately bring this bill up for a vote, a bill that is 681 pages. It was received in

my office just a few hours ago. I have not read it all. It is 681 pages, and I just got it.

If there is any Republican here who has already read it, then they have been through some kind of speed reading course that I have not been through. But I have gotten through a few pages. Page 54 is a good place to start. Surely to goodness, no one here has read page 54, because if they have, they would not be asking for this bill to be brought up immediately. They would want time to read it, because page 54 says what? It says the Federal Government shall be prohibited from negotiating with the big drug manufacturers to bring down the high cost of medicine. And they call this a seniors bill? Give me a break.

And if that is not enough, my colleagues can turn to page 18 of the bill. Page 18 of the bill tells us what seniors are going to get, or, really, what seniors are not going to get. This is clearly a bill written by the big drug manufacturers and the big insurance companies, not to benefit our seniors, not to bring down the high cost of medicine, but to benefit the big drug manufacturers and the big insurance companies.

Make no mistake about it, seniors, it is important the Members here understand, understand what the seniors get in this bill. There is a \$420 yearly premium, \$35 a month. There is a \$250 deductible, and then, from \$250 to \$2,250, Medicare pays 75 percent of the bill leaving the senior to pay 25 percent. That part sounds pretty good. But then from \$2,250 all the way up to \$5,100, guess what? The senior is back stuck paying the full price for the prescription drug while still being required, under this bill, to pay a \$35-a-month premium.

This legislation boils down to this: Of the first \$5,100 worth of medicine, seniors are going to still be stuck paying \$4,020 while Members of Congress, who wrote and approved this bill, only pay \$1,275.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) says that the AARP does not speak for seniors of America? The AARP represents 35 million seniors, dues-paying, card-carrying voting seniors. These seniors care what we do, and they are watching what we do, and we better do right by them.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR).

Mr. TAYLOR of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, a little over a year ago, the President of the United States, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz all told me, me, that not only did the Iraqis have weapons of mass destruction, but that they had their finger on the trigger and were getting ready to use them. Now, 7

months after we have occupied Iraq, the only thing harder to find than a Republican who will tell me where those weapons of mass destruction are is a Republican who will tell me how they are going to pay for this bill.

In the 29 months since the passage of their budget, their spending, their tax cuts, they have increased our Nation's debt by \$1,229,407,000.

□ 1630

This bill alone will add another \$400 billion to our staggering \$6.8 trillion debt.

But if you have noticed, not one of my Republican colleagues will say how they are going to pay for it, because they do not want you to know that a few seniors will benefit from this, but all of us will end up paying interest on it. And we are already squandering \$1 billion of your money a day on that interest.

This is nothing but an auction to the insurance companies and the pharmaceutical companies of this Nation, for campaign contributions to the Republican party. And I want one Republican to hold up one prescription and just tell me how much less it is going to be 1 year from today, 2 years from today, because that is what seniors really want. They do not want another bureaucracy. They do not want \$400 billion worth of debt.

The people who are seniors now are the Greatest Generation, and the last thing the Greatest Generation wanted is the country they fought for in World War II and Korea to be bankrupted by some political prank now.

So I ask the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) how are you going to pay for it, and please name one drug that will be cheaper 1 year from today.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I would just like to remind the gentleman that last year's Democrat prescription drug bill cost \$1 trillion, \$1 trillion, almost three times what this bill costs.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, whether you support this bill or not, the Members should be very concerned that we are about to cast a vote on a major, major piece of legislation that only a small handful of House Members have actually read because it was not finalized and filed until 1:30 this morning.

They should be very concerned that this marshal law rule waives the House rule that requires the conference report layover for 3 days before coming to the floor for a vote. Of course, it was not supposed to be this way.

Just a few weeks ago, 44 members of the Republican Study Committee demanded that the Republican leadership allow Members 3 days to read the conference report after it was filed and be-

fore forcing them to vote on it. It was a reasonable demand since that is what the rules of the House say.

The gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) agreed to it as has been publicly reported. Here is how the November 3, 2003, edition of Roll Call reported it: "At a GOP conference meeting that was called exclusively to update Members on the Medicare talks, Hastert assured his troops that they would now get regular briefings on the Medicare bill and would have at least 3 days to look over the conference report before having to vote on it, according to several Members who attended."

"The Speaker wants to make sure that Members are comfortable making this historic change" to Medicare, said Hastert spokesman John Feehery."

The November 7, 2003, edition of Congress Daily quoted the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. NORWOOD) "referring to a promise made by House Speaker HASTERT."

The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. NORWOOD) said, "The thing I'm happiest about is we get 3 days with the language."

Now, we all know the Speaker of the House is an honorable man, but apparently the Republican leadership is willing to renege on his commitment and to ensure Members do not get 3 days with the language. Because while various summaries, press releases, and drafts may have been posted on Web sites of today, the final language of that conference report was not filed until early this morning. And 3 days from Friday morning is Monday morning, not Friday afternoon.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I urge Members to join me in opposing the important parliamentary vote known as the previous question. If it is defeated, I will amend the rule so that it no longer waives the House's rule requiring a 3-day layover for all conference reports.

Voting no will not defeat the Republican Medicare bill, but it is the only way to uphold the commitment of the Speaker of the House and to allow Members and the public to examine this 700-page \$400 billion Medicare bill before voting on it.

I urge Members to vote "no" on the previous question.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I remind my colleagues that this body is about to embark on a monumental endeavor. We are about to consider the most significant benefit America's seniors have ever seen since the creation of the Medicare program nearly 40 years ago. We are about to give seniors the best tool that medicine has to offer, prescription drugs. A tool that they have been denied, that our government has not supplied to them. We are about to give that to them, Mr. Speaker. That is not even to mention the most significant and deliberative reform that Medicare has ever seen.

I urge my colleagues to support American seniors, to support the future of the Medicare program, and to support this Congress in one of the most promising endeavors I have ever been a part of in my years in this esteemed body. Join me in taking a bold step closer to consideration of this extraordinary legislation. I ask the Democrats, stop defeating these attempts, stop delaying help to our seniors, and stop destroying their trust in their government.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BASS). The question is on ordering the previous question.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

—————

WAIVING REQUIREMENT OF
CLAUSE 6(A) OF RULE XIII WITH
RESPECT TO CONSIDERATION OF
CERTAIN RESOLUTIONS

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 458 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 458

Resolved, That the requirement of clause 6(a) of rule XIII for a two-thirds vote to consider a report from the Committee on Rules on the same day it is presented to the House is waived with respect to any resolution reported on the legislative day of November 21, 2003, providing for consideration or disposition of any of the following measures:

(1) A bill or joint resolution making further continuing appropriations for the fiscal year 2004, or any amendment thereto.

(2) A bill or joint resolution making general appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, any amendment thereto, or any conference report thereon.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FROST), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 458 is a rule that waives clause 6(a) of rule XIII with respect to same-day consideration against certain resolutions reported from the Committee on Rules. Specifically, this rule waives the requirement for a two-thirds majority vote in the House to consider a rule on the same day it has been reported by the Committee on Rules.

This rule's waiver applies to any special rule reported on the legislative day of November 21, 2003, providing for the consideration or disposition of any of the following:

A, a bill or joint resolution making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2004 or any amendments thereto; or

B, a bill or joint resolution making general appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, any amendment thereto or any conference reported thereon.

I urge my colleagues in the House to join me in approving H. Res. 458. Its passage will help expedite the consideration of either another continuing resolution, if that becomes needed, or even conference reports on the last few remaining fiscal year 2004 appropriations bills, including the Foreign Operations bill, Transportation-Treasury bill, the Agriculture bill, the VA-HUD bill, the Commerce-Justice bill, the District of Columbia bill, and the Labor-HHS bill.

I believe that we are in the waning days of this year's legislative session with only a relatively small number of must-do legislative items still left to finish. Approving this same-day waiver rule will help provide for prompt consideration of these important funding bills.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee on Rules approved this rule last night, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting its passage.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. FROST asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, marshal law rules like this one are symptomatic of the failure of this Republican government. Republicans are doing such harm to America, from Medicare and the economy to foreign policy and homeland security, that keeping the public in the dark has become their chief priority.

So today, Republican leaders are yet again waiving the rules of the House. Later today they plan to do it in order to force through their plan to end Medicare as we know it, which is how the chief author of the Republican Medicare bill describes their goal.

But first, Republican leaders want to pass this marshal law rule so that they can rush through a spending bill before Members, the press, and the public have had the chance to find out what is really in it.

Mr. Speaker, they will not even tell us which spending bill they plan to hide from us today. All we know is that it will either spend tens of billions of dollars in taxpayer money, or that it will spend hundreds of billions of dollars in taxpayer money. Either way, it will become law before it has even been read by anyone except for a handful of Republicans at the White House and in

the Congress. But since these are the same Republicans who have exploded the budget deficit to nearly \$500 billion, raising the debt tax on all Americans, no one has much faith in them anymore.

Mr. Speaker, after nearly a decade of controlling the Congress, the Republican Party's fundamental goal is simply protecting its own power by hiding from the public the damage they are doing to America. Of course, if you look at the Republican record, you can understand why they are so desperate to keep it hidden. In the nearly 3 years since George Bush became President, Republicans have created a whole host of problems for the American people.

On national security, the Bush administration has plunged this Nation into its worst foreign policy crisis since the end of the cold war because they would not trust the American people with the truth about Iraq and because they could not work with our allies around the world. And while U.S. taxpayers are spending hundreds of billions of dollars on Iraq, our homeland defense needs here in the United States remain dangerously unmet.

On domestic policy, of course, Republicans are going for the right wing gold. Later today they will try to finalize Newt Gingrich's dream of forcing Medicare to wither on the vine, shattering Medicare's nearly 40-year-old promise to American citizens. That debate, Mr. Speaker, will be a case study in the public dishonesty that is fundamental to the Republican government.

Over and over again, Republicans will repeat their poll-tested sound bytes. They will save Medicare reform and hope that millions of seniors do not notice the Republicans are forcing them out of traditional Medicare and into HMOs and insurance companies. They will talk about choice and ignore the fact that millions of seniors will lose the ability to choose their own doctors. And they will decry skyrocketing prescription prices and hope no one notices that they are actually protecting drug company profits by making it illegal for Medicare to negotiate lower prices for senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Republicans will wax poetic about the generosity of their drug benefit, hiding the fact that premiums and benefits will actually be set by HMOs and insurance companies; and that even under the Republicans' rosiest scenario, seniors with average drug bills will still have to pay about \$2,500 per year out of their own pockets. Of course, Republicans will not say a thing about the \$12 billion slush funds they are setting up for HMOs or insurance companies or the \$139 billion in windfall profits they are giving to the big drug companies.

Mr. Speaker, no wonder the Republican Medicare bill does not take effect until after the election. Republican political strategists are desperately hoping that seniors do not discover this truth about this assault on Medicare before they go to the polls in 2004. But