

under the guise of improving Medicare, although seniors never really believed that. The bill passes in the dead of night, seniors' Medicare premiums go up 17 percent, the largest increase in history, and Republicans cash in with political contributions.

Mr. Speaker, that is shameful.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair would remind all Members that remarks in debate may not include personal criticisms of or accusations against the President.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, is pointing out that the President receives tens of millions of dollars from the drug and insurance companies, is that considered a criticism? Is that appropriate to say?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Remarks in debate must avoid personally offensive language toward the President.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I was only talking about his actions. It is nothing personal. I just thought that tens of millions of dollars in contributions which lead to legislation which means bigger profits for the insurance and drug companies was shameful. I did not cast aspersions on the President himself.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The accusation that the President did not tell the truth prompted the Chair's admonition.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. I guess, Mr. Speaker, that I do not know if the President told the truth, but people who report to the President that should have been informing the President certainly did not tell the truth, because they said the bill would cost \$400 billion. It cost \$534 billion, and that led to the biggest Medicare premium increase in history.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The President's advisors are not protected by House rules and practices governing debate.

MEDICARE PART B PREMIUMS TO INCREASE 17 PERCENT

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

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to talk about the Bush administration's increase on our senior citizens of Part B of Medicare, which is the doctors' coverage, of an additional \$139.20 per year. That means that seniors will begin paying an additional \$11.60 a month, the total premium being \$78.20 per month. So over the course of a year, the increase over the previous amount is 17 percent. This is on top of a 14 percent increase from last year.

This is going to eat up a substantial chunk of the cost of living allowance that seniors truly depend upon, and

with heating prices in the winter increasing, gasoline prices increasing, food prices increasing, this is a huge, unprecedented increase in the Medicare Part B premium.

Mr. Speaker, normally this premium increase would be announced in October when the Social Security COLA increases lock in so that seniors could calculate their budget for the coming year. But the Bush administration actually announced this increase during a holiday weekend just about a month ago, hoping that no one would really take notice.

The question I have is how much of this increase is actually due to the fact that the Bush administration refuses to let the government of the United States negotiate the best prices for pharmaceuticals and prescription drugs with these big companies that contribute so much to campaigns here in Washington, and, because of that, our seniors are going to have to bear the cost of an additional 17 percent increase.

This is the largest increase in the history of the program. Under this administration, Medicare premiums have increased twice as much as during the Clinton presidency, which lasted 8 years. So in a short 3½ years, they have increased the amount twice compared to the prior 8 years. And the premium increase comes on the heels of a decision by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson, not to permit the government to negotiate the best price and not to permit our seniors to buy prescription drugs that come in here that are safe and approved by FDA from Canada and other places.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we should never compromise on safety, nor should we restrict the competition that could be instrumental in holding down rising prices for our Medicare beneficiaries. So I offered an amendment that was passed in this House on the agriculture bill that would permit the FDA to allow the reimportation of drugs from Canada and overseas at lower prices.

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When our bill was sent over to the Senate, the other body, they struck that provision out.

So I would hope that Senator KERRY would go back over to the Senate and hold a press conference and merely tell the Republicans over there to put my amendment back in, because it would do what the Republican prescription drug bill forbids doing, and that is allowing the same drugs that are sold here that exist in Canada and other places to be brought into this country so our seniors do not have to pay these exorbitant prices. And with these rising Medicare premiums, it is really something to think about.

The Republicans not only do not permit the reimportation of drugs, they lock the hands of the Federal Government to negotiate the best price. And

who ends up paying the burden of the increase? Our senior citizens, and they have just gotten the bill, and, as I said, over the next year, they are going to be paying an additional \$139.20 on the doctor's portion, the Medicare Part B premium. That is simply wrong, when the wealthiest people in this country, those earning over \$1 million, have gotten over \$100,000 a year in additional tax cuts from the Bush administration and so many people in our country have absolutely no health insurance at all. And our seniors are having to choose in the wintertime between food and medicine and heating the places in which they live.

So I wanted to say a word about that this evening and also to place in the RECORD an article from the New York Times today about the tragic, tragic beheading of Eugene Armstrong from Hillsdale, Michigan. I want to draw to the attention of the American people the fact that there is an additional hostage being held, Mr. Jack Hensley of Marietta, Georgia. These men were contractors. They were not under the employ of our U.S. military, and I think that the jagged line between civilian and military inside of Iraq is something this administration has done.

There are over 25,000 contractors in Iraq right now, and when they get in trouble, nobody helps them. In fact, Mr. Hensley's brother said that over the last few days, few weeks, those that were guarding these gentlemen disappeared; they left. They were fearful of their own welfare, yet these Americans remain there.

In the case of Mr. Hensley, he was in touch with his wife, saying that he wanted financially to remain there because he is laid off. He was a worker from our country, laid off, and she had been urging him to come back home because the family had become increasingly concerned that their guards were leaving.

Now, what kind of a military operation is it where we have 25,000 contractors whose lives are at risk, yet they may be earning more money than our regular military? But the lines are blurred, and one really cannot tell who has responsibility. Here we have another situation of a patriotic American who has lost his life so tragically over in Iraq simply because this administration cannot get it right, and they cannot conduct a military operation where people's lives are protected in theater to the greatest extent possible.

We had the armored Humvees with no armor. We have Guard and Reserve forces strung out, without the kind of backup they need, tired, in the field. We are short two divisions in the U.S. military, and now we have civilians really performing functions that the regular military should do. These gentlemen were doing construction which is normally done by the Army Corps of Engineers, who have backup. In this case, we have Americans whose body guards end up leaving, and they are

cold in the field. They have nobody to help them. What kind of a system, what kind of a military operation is this administration conducting in the nation of Iraq?

I want to place these additional articles from the New York Times in the RECORD, along with a chart showing the increasing number of hostages being taken in Iraq over the last several months, and it is on the increase.

GRIEF AND AN EVENING VIGIL IN A MICHIGAN
SMALL TOWN

(By Danny Hakim)

HILLSDALE, MI, Sept. 20.—Scores of townspeople gathered at an impromptu candlelight vigil in the early evening here after hearing that a Westerner identified as Eugene Armstrong had been executed in Iraq.

Mr. Armstrong grew up in this town of about 8,000 people in southern Michigan, and though he left more than a dozen years ago to travel the world, his brothers and cousins remain here.

"We're just devastated," said Cyndi Armstrong, a cousin by marriage who attended the vigil on behalf of the family. "I don't know what else to say about how we feel."

Mr. Armstrong, a 53-year-old construction worker known as Jack, lived with his wife in Thailand. Cyndi Armstrong said F.B.I. officials first notified members of the Armstrong family last week that he and two other Western workers had been kidnapped in Iraq. Among those notified, she said, was Mr. Armstrong's mother, who lives in Germany.

Few in the crowd here knew Mr. Armstrong well because he left Hillsdale long ago. His brothers chose not to attend the vigil.

"His brothers are broken up about it," said a cousin of Jack Armstrong, Pat Armstrong, who served as a marine in the Middle East during the first Persian Gulf war and who said he was not happy about how the latest Iraq war had deteriorated.

"I think we should steamroll them, either that or leave" Pat Armstrong said. "Eliminate the problem or leave instead of not trying to upset too many people."

The vigil took place in the early evening while it was still light in front of the Hillsdale County Courthouse on a town square framed by light poles bearing hanging planters with purple flowers. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, candles were wedged into plastic coffee cup lids and passed through the crowd, and a local pastor, Randy Branson, was asked to say a few words.

"We know the price of freedom is being paid all across the globe," Mr. Branson said. "Today we pray for freedom and the two men who are still being held."

Cyndi Armstrong said Jack Armstrong loved to travel and had spent time in Germany before moving to Thailand.

"He was a great guy and he loved his country," she said, twisting an American flag in her hands. "He liked to travel; he liked to read books. I didn't know him personally very well, but he was a great guy, and he will be missed very much."

Richard Buehrle, 46, a cook who knows one of Mr. Armstrong's brothers, said: "I heard about it at 2:30 this afternoon. I was kind of shocked, but it didn't really surprise me. Once they're captured over there, it's touch and go."

Mrs. Armstrong said that only two weeks ago her own daughter enlisted in the Army. She did not want to talk about her personal feelings on the war, Ms. Armstrong said, though she supported her daughter's decision. Still, she said, it was hard to comprehend what had happened to Mr. Armstrong.

"I don't understand," she said, "Jack was there to help them, not to hurt them."

Jack Hensley of Marietta, Ga., is the remaining American hostage from the three construction workers who were taken from their house in Baghdad. The third is a Briton.

Earlier Monday, Mr. Hensley's relatives spoke to reporters about his kidnapping.

His brother, Ty Hensley, told NBC News that he and his brother had been regular e-mail correspondents before the kidnapping. Ty Hensley said his brother had become increasingly concerned in the week and a half before he and his colleagues were abducted. Their guards were leaving one by one because of death threats, Jack Hensley had written, and he believed the three Westerners were being watched.

Ty Hensley said that his brother had gone to Iraq when he could not find construction work at home and that leaving early would have been a financial blow.

But he said Jack's wife, Patty, had tried to persuade him to come home anyway.

"I'm sure that he had signed a year contract," Ty Hensley said of his brother. "It was important that he make it a year for him financially, but she began talking to him in very strong capacity to come back over the last week and a half. And she told him it does not matter financially, to come home."

"I talked to Jack every other day through e-mail," Mr. Hensley continued. "And the type of work that he is doing, again, is to work with the Iraqi people in helping develop a water system for the Iraqi people. He's helped work on a school, rebuild a museum and also housing for the Iraqi people."

HOSTAGES IN IRAQ

In addition to two Americans, Nicholas Berg and Eugene Armstrong, at least 27 people from 9 different countries are believed to have been killed in captivity this year, according to information from reporters for The New York Times and news agencies. At least 22 others are still being held hostage, but at least 81 have been released or rescued.

MEDICARE BY THE NUMBERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCCOTTER). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, the Medicare Modernization Act: good for the HMOs, great for the pharmaceutical companies, bad for seniors and bad for persons with disabilities.

Let us consider the numbers.

\$54 million: That is the amount drug companies spent lobbying Congress and the administration between 1997 and 2002.

675: That is the number of paid drug company lobbyists, more than 1 for each of the 535 Members of the U.S. House and Senate.

\$67.7 million: That is the amount of drug company political contributions since 1999, and Republicans received 71 percent of those.

\$891,208: That is the amount of drug company campaign contributions President Bush has received since 1999.

Zero: That is the number of Democrats who were allowed into the conference committee when this bill was finally crafted, the bill that was supposed to provide relief to seniors but

really has provided great relief to the drug companies. That means that the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), veterans of the House and experts on Medicare, were locked out of the committee.

Twenty-three percent: the percent of average Americans' out-of-pocket medical expenses spent on prescription drugs.

Seventy percent: the amount of discounts the Veterans' Administration obtains on cholesterol medications by using its bargaining clout with the pharmaceutical companies, something not allowed for Medicare beneficiaries.

Sixty-six cents: the amount the Veterans' Administration paid for a 30-day supply of Zocor, that is high cholesterol medicine, in 2002, compared to \$3.77 at the retail pharmacy.

Thirty-six percent: the amount of U.S. medical research funded, by who? By you, the taxpayers, by the Federal Government, not by the pharmaceutical companies.

\$139 billion: the amount of additional drug company profits to be reaped from the new Medicare law.

\$46 billion: the amount of additional payments to Medicare HMOs expected from the new Medicare law.

\$400 billion: That is how much the Republicans swore the Medicare bill would cost.

\$540 billion: That is the amount the Medicare actuary, the numbers cruncher, knew it was really going to cost, but he was threatened with his job if he told the truth to Congress.

\$576 billion: That is the recent estimate by the Office of Management and Budget of the cost of the Republican expensive and worthless Medicare plan.

\$4,000: what a senior citizen with \$5,000 in yearly drug costs would have to pay under the new Medicare benefit.

2.7 million: the number of seniors expected to lose existing retiree drug benefits under the new Medicare law.

Six million: the number of low-income seniors and persons with disabilities are expected to pay more for prescription drugs under the new Medicare law.

Seventeen percent: the average profit margin of the top-ten drug companies in 2002.

3.1 percent: the average profit margin of the rest of the Fortune 500 companies in 2002.

Seventeen percent: next year's increase in Medicare Part B premiums.

2.5 percent: That is the expected Social Security cost of living adjustment increase next year.

53.6 percent: That is the percent of the average 65-year-old's Social Security recipients benefits that would go to out-of-pocket Medicare expenses in 2026. In other words, more than half of their Social Security check would end up going to pay for Medicare expenses.

Now, at the time that this bill passed, I warned my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who thought it was so great and that the senior citizens would love it. I have to tell my