

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