

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

THE PROGRESSIVE MESSAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ELLISON. Madam Speaker, my name is KEITH ELLISON. I am here to speak for the Progressive Caucus, to talk about the Progressive Message.

Tonight, before I begin, I just want to say that my heart is sick and broken for the horrible tragedy that occurred at Fort Hood, and I ask all Americans to keep the families in their prayers and in their thoughts.

I now will proceed with the hour.

Tonight is the Progressive Message, we are here to talk about a progressive message for America, a message that says the human and civil rights of all people must be respected; a message that says dignity of people, regardless of their race, class or religion must be respected; a dignity that says that if 36 other countries in the world can provide universal health care coverage for their citizens, how come the richest country in the world, not only the richest country in the world but the richest country in the history of the world, can't do it.

Why do we have 50 million people who are not covered? Why do we have a doubling of premiums for the people who do have health care coverage? Why do we have people being excluded for a preexisting condition? Why do we have these things?

Well, the time for those things to end is now. We are within grasp of major health care reform and no scare tactics, no fear-mongering, no stretches of the facts are going to change that.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle are quite upset about the present state of affairs because they know that Americans want health care reform. They want health care reform, and I believe they're going to get it.

I want to say that I have spent these last several weeks talking about the problem. I have also spent many days discussing the Democratic bill, and I will do so tonight.

But I want to spend a little time talking about what our friends on the other side of the aisle are proposing in their bill because, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, we haven't heard much detail from the Republican side of the aisle. We haven't heard much at all, but they recently put forth an out-

line of a plan, an outline of a plan, not a plan, but just sort of like an outline of one, and it's not good.

It was always convenient to just bang, bang, bang on what the Democrats were proposing, but now that America has said, okay, you guys don't like what the Democrats are calling for, what have you got? And their answer was less than satisfactory.

Under the GOP health plan—I don't believe it's been introduced as a bill yet; it's just sort of a plan—people with preexisting conditions would pay up to 50 percent more than average for insurance coverage under the GOP plan. States would have to cover the rest of the tab with a stable funding source. This is Roll Call, November 4, 2009. Check it out. Under the Republican plan, most States already have such plans but typically are much more expensive than regular insurance and have not made much of a dent in the ranks of the uninsured. Also from Roll Call.

A key piece of earlier Republican drafts, tax credits that would help people afford insurance, was rejected by the House minority leader as too expensive. Also Roll Call, November 4.

The Republican measure has no limits on annual out-of-pocket costs, which means bankruptcy for some. But let me quote from the Roll Call article: The Republican measure has no limits on annual out-of-pocket costs, nor does it provide any direct assistance for uninsured people to buy insurance.

So how are we going to deal with the uninsured problem, which you and I pay for anyway?

The Congressional Budget Office, the CBO, has said on Wednesday that an alternative health care plan put forward by House Republicans would have, quote, little impact in extending health care benefits to roughly 30 million uninsured Americans. This is from the New York Times.

Do you mean to tell me after all this attacking of the Democrats' proposal, the Democratic plan, that the Republicans have just bashed us, week after week, day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute—oh, it's bad, bad, bad, and that's all you ever hear is "no"—they finally come up with their idea and they're going to leave 30 million people uninsured?

This has got to be April Fool's Day come early. The Republican bill has no chance of passage, because Americans really don't want it, because if they did, we would be talking about it. But I quote again from the New York Times: The Republican bill, which has no chance of passage, would extend insurance coverage to about 3 million people by the year 2019.

Why aren't they embarrassed? I have no idea. The Republican bill, which has no chance of passage, would extend insurance coverage to about 3 million people by 2019, and, continuing to quote, would leave 52 million people uninsured. The budget office said, meaning the proportion of nonelderly

Americans with coverage would remain about the same as it is now, roughly at 83 percent.

Let me read it again. The proportion of nonelderly Americans with coverage would remain about the same as now, about 83 percent, meaning that we have upwards of 16 to 17 percent who don't have insurance.

Going along with the Republican plan, the Republican plan tonight, as we are discussing the Progressive Message, we're just going to talk about their plan since they got real expert talking about ours, we're going to let the American people know the real facts about the Republican plan. This is not a criticism or an attack on any individual member of the party opposite. I regard that they are honorable people, but we have to talk about their plan because it's not a good one. And the reason they haven't been bragging about it is because not even they are proud of it.

The Congressional Budget Office umpires say the House Republican health plan would only make a small dent in the number of uninsured Americans. Let me say that again. According to the Associated Press article on November 4, 2009, Congressional Budget umpires say, quote, the House Republican health plan would make only a small dent in the number of uninsured Americans.

Wait a minute. I thought that they had some great plan. How can you not make a dent in the number of uninsured Americans and still claim you have a good plan? Their plan is an embarrassment. They're not bragging about it because they, themselves, know that it's far more strategic to just bash away on the Democratic plan rather than talk about their own plan, which is nothing but status quo and keep insurance companies making lots and lots and lots of money. That's what it's all about—protect the wealthy and let everybody else do the best they can with what they got.

Let me go to another important quote: Late Wednesday, last night, a bill that Republicans expect to offer as an alternative to the Democratic package received its assessment from the congressional budget analysts who concluded that the proposal wouldn't do anything to help reduce the ranks of the uninsured. The CBO said some people would see higher premiums, including older and sicker people.

This is the Republican plan? Here is one. The CBO, the Congressional Budget Office, begins with the baseline estimate that 17 percent of legal nonelderly residents won't have health care in 2010. That's a lot of people. Seventeen percent of legal nonelderly residents won't have health care insurance in 2010. That's an indictment of the status quo, which the Republicans support.

But, in 2019, after 10 years of the Republican plan, the CBO estimates that it will still be stuck at 17 percent of the legal nonelderly residents not having insurance.