reckless canoe trip down the Connecticut River in New Hampshire.

While on a campaign swing through the first-in-the-Nation primary State, the VP decided to demonstrate his environmental prowess for the cameras by floating four miles downstream and then climbing ashore with a $100,000 Federal grant check for the local water commission.

Unfortunately, Gore and his handlers determined too late the low water level on the river might not fully float Gore’s boat, thereby presenting a potentially embarrassing political moment to the campaign flotilla. Rather than forgo the photo opportunity, the local water commission, yes, the same group that received the check, was persuaded to release 4 billion gallons of captured water down the river for the 35 minutes Gore was afloat. Water usage cost to release the 4 billion gallons: $7.1 million.

This was not the first time. They did the same thing in Colorado in 1996 at the Chatfield Reservoir. In either case while farmers pay a premium for reliable water supplies, the Vice President spends their money like water.

Mr. Speaker, as they say over in the White House, “Whatever makes your boat float.”

REJECT THE MASSIVELY IRRESPONSIBLE REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

(Mr. ETHERIDGE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to call on this Congress to reverse course and pass fiscally responsible legislation to provide targeted tax relief for America’s families.

Mr. Speaker, the people of North Carolina sent me to this House to work to put our Nation’s fiscal house in order, honor our values and invest in our future. Last Congress, I proudly voted to balance the Federal budget for our future. Last Congress, I proudly given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, we have a saying in Texas, “If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.” Well, our health care delivery system by HMOs is broken.

According to the day if you read almost any newspaper, the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 87 percent of doctors said their patients had experienced denial of coverage over the last 2 years; 78 percent had trouble getting approval for a certain drug they wanted to prescribe; 69 percent had trouble getting a diagnostic test approved; 52 percent had trouble getting patients referred to a specialist.

And now to bring you up to date, the Republican leadership announced their intention once again to bypass the committee process and take a managed care bill directly here to the floor.

Once again they are starting down a road that ignores the American people. They are letting the HMOs write their own legislation. Once again they are writing a major piece of legislation in the Speaker’s office without bipartisan support.

Another Texas saying we have, and I think it applies, is that they are letting the fox guard the chicken house. What we need is real HMO reform, not a fake or a fig leaf.

ADMINISTRATION FALLS SHORT ON VA FUNDING

(Mr. STEARNS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, the Clinton administration proposed a dismal VA medical care budget earlier this year. It is shortchanging our veterans.

We have heard from VA officials that an additional $1.1 billion is needed just to maintain current service levels.

Deep concerns regarding the administration’s proposal for veterans’ medical care led our Committee on Veterans’ Affairs to call for an additional $1.7 billion in funding for the upcoming fiscal year. The new funding being suggested by the Vice President over the weekend will not cover the needs of our veterans.

He proposed an additional $900 million for medical care. But based upon the administration’s own figures, the cost for pay increases and inflation alone will cost $900 million.

The administration’s budget fails to cover the costs of treating hepatitis C, a “silent epidemic” afflicting many veterans, and fails to cover the cost of emergency care.

Mr. Speaker, we need to provide for our veterans. It is a moral obligation.

SAVE SOCIAL SECURITY FIRST

(Ms. SANCHEZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, here we go again. Social Security is the primary retirement system for the majority of retired Americans. It provides benefits to 33 million Americans of all ages and it keeps 12 million of them out of poverty.

The GOP Social Security approach is really an unreliable response that supports wealthy special interests. Why does the GOP want to undercut a sound economy with a tax scheme designed to benefit the few?

We must protect Social Security. This means less debt, lower interest costs, rising living standards, more money made available for seniors’ priorities, and more security for Social Security.

The Republican tax cuts mean higher deficits, higher interest rates and lower