

or make such other provisions deemed appropriate.

(e) *Service on subcommittees.*—(1) The chairman and the ranking minority member shall serve as *ex officio* members of all subcommittees and shall have the right to vote on all matters before the subcommittees. The chairman and the ranking minority member may not be counted for the purpose of establishing a quorum.

(2) Any member of the committee who is not a member of the subcommittee may have the privilege of sitting and nonparticipatory attendance at subcommittee hearings in accordance with clause 2(g)(2) of House rule XI. Such member may not:

(i) vote on any matter;

(ii) be counted for the purpose of an establishing a quorum for any motion, vote, or other subcommittee action;

(iii) participate in questioning a witness under the 5-minute rule, unless permitted to do so by the subcommittee chairman or a majority of the subcommittee a quorum being present;

(iv) raise points of order; or

(v) offer amendments or motions.

(f) *Subcommittee Hearings and Meetings.*—(1) Each subcommittee is authorized to meet, hold hearings, receive evidence, and report to the committee on all matters referred to it or under its jurisdiction after consultation by the subcommittee chairmen with the committee chairman. (See committee rule VII.)

(2) After consultation with the committee chairman, subcommittee chairmen shall set dates for hearings and meetings of their subcommittees and shall request the majority staff director to make any announcement relating thereto. (See committee rule VII(b).) In setting the dates, the committee chairman and subcommittee chairman shall consult with other subcommittee chairmen and relevant committee and subcommittee ranking minority members in an effort to avoid simultaneously scheduling committee and subcommittee meetings or hearings to the extent practicable.

(3) Notice of all subcommittee meetings shall be provided to the chairman and the ranking minority member of the committee by the majority staff director.

(4) Subcommittees may hold meetings or hearings outside of the House if the chairman of the committee and other subcommittee chairmen and the ranking minority member of the subcommittee is consulted in advance to ensure that there is no scheduling problem. However, the majority of the committee may authorize such meeting or hearing.

(5) The provisions regarding notice and the agenda of committee meetings under committee rule II(a) and special or additional meetings under committee rule II(b) shall apply to subcommittee meetings.

(6) If a vacancy occurs in a subcommittee chairmanship, the chairman may set the dates for hearings and meetings of the subcommittee during the period of vacancy. The chairman may also appoint an acting subcommittee chairman until the vacancy is filled.

(g) *Subcommittee Action.*—(1) Any bill, resolution, recommendation, or other matter ordered reported to the committee by a subcommittee shall be promptly reported by the subcommittee chairman or any subcommittee member authorized to do so by the subcommittee.

(2) Upon receipt of such report, the majority staff director of the committee shall promptly advise all members of the committee of the subcommittee action.

(3) The committee shall not consider any matters reported by subcommittees until 2 calendar days have elapsed from the date of reporting, unless the chairman or a majority of the committee determines otherwise.

(h) *Subcommittee Investigations.*—No investigation shall be initiated by a subcommittee without the prior consultation with the chairman of the committee or a majority of the committee.

XI. COMMITTEE BUDGET, STAFF, AND TRAVEL

(a) *Committee Budget.*—The chairman, in consultation with the majority members of the committee, and the minority members of the committee, shall prepare a preliminary budget for each session of the Congress. Such budget shall include necessary amounts for staff personnel, travel, investigation, and other expenses of the committee and subcommittees. After consultation with the ranking minority member, the chairman shall include an amount budgeted to minority members for staff under their direction and supervision. Thereafter, the chairman shall combine such proposals into a consolidated committee budget, and shall take whatever action is necessary to have such budget duly authorized by the House.

(b) *Committee Staff.*—(1) The chairman shall appoint and determine the remuneration of, and may remove, the professional and clerical employees of the committee not assigned to the minority. The professional and clerical staff of the committee not assigned to the minority shall be under the general supervision and direction of the chairman, who shall establish and assign the duties and responsibilities of such staff members and delegate such authority as he or she determines appropriate. (See House rule X, clause 9.)

(2) The ranking minority member of the committee shall appoint and determine the remuneration of, and may remove, the professional and clerical staff assigned to the minority within the budget approved for such purposes. The professional and clerical staff assigned to the minority shall be under the general supervision and direction of the ranking minority member of the committee who may delegate such authority as he or she determines appropriate.

(3) From the funds made available for the appointment of committee staff pursuant to any primary or additional expense resolution, the chairman shall ensure that each subcommittee is adequately funded and staffed to discharge its responsibilities and that the minority party is fairly treated in the appointment of such staff (See House rule X, clause 6(d)).

(c) *Committee Travel.*—(1) Consistent with the primary expense resolution and such additional expense resolution as may have been approved, the provisions of this rule shall govern official travel of committee members and committee staff regarding domestic and foreign travel (See House rule XI, clause 2(n) and House rule X, clause 8 (reprinted in Appendix A)). Official travel for any member or any committee staff member shall be paid only upon the prior authorization of the chairman. Official travel may be authorized by the chairman for any committee Member and any committee staff member in connection with the attendance of hearings conducted by the committee and its subcommittees and meetings, conferences, facility inspections, and investigations which involve activities or subject matter relevant to the general jurisdiction of the committee. Before such authorization is given there shall be submitted to the chairman in writing the following:

(i) The purpose of the official travel;

(ii) The dates during which the official travel is to be made and the date or dates of the event for which the official travel is being made;

(iii) The location of the event for which the official travel is to be made; and

(iv) The names of members and committee staff seeking authorization.

(2) In the case of official travel of members and staff of a subcommittee to hearings, meetings, conferences, facility inspections and investigations involving activities or subject matter under the jurisdiction of such subcommittee to be paid for out of funds allocated to the committee, prior authorization must be obtained from the subcommittee chairman and the full committee chairman. Such prior authorization shall be given by the chairman only upon the representation by the applicable subcommittee chairman in writing setting forth those items enumerated in clause (1).

(3) Within 60 days of the conclusion of any official travel authorized under this rule, there shall be submitted to the committee chairman a written report covering the information gained as a result of the hearing, meeting, conference, facility inspection or investigation attended pursuant to such official travel.

(4) Local currencies owned by the United States shall be made available to the committee and its employees engaged in carrying out their official duties outside the United States, its territories or possessions. No appropriated funds shall be expended for the purpose of defraying expenses of members of the committee or its employees in any country where local currencies are available for this purpose; and the following conditions shall apply with respect to their use of such currencies:

(i) No Member or employee of the committee shall receive or expend local currencies for subsistence in any country at a rate in excess of the maximum per diem rate set forth in applicable Federal law; and

(ii) Each Member or employee of the committee shall make an itemized report to the chairman within 60 days following the completion of travel showing the dates each country was visited, the amount of per diem furnished, the cost of transportation furnished, and any funds expended for any other official purpose, and shall summarize in these categories the total foreign currencies and appropriated funds expended. All such individual reports shall be filed by the chairman with the Committee on House Administration and shall be open to public inspection.

XII. AMENDMENT OF RULES

These rules may be amended by a majority vote of the committee. A proposed change in these rules shall not be considered by the committee as provided in clause 2 of House rule XI, unless written notice of the proposed change has been provided to each committee Member 2 legislative days in advance of the date on which the matter is to be considered. Any such change in the rules of the committee shall be published in the Congressional Record within 30 calendar days after its approval.

IN SUPPORT OF THE MANDATES INFORMATION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TANCREDO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with encouragement that this House just passed the Mandates Information Act, which will help to safeguard us from making unfunded mandates to the private sector.

Well, I am here today to do just that, to address an unfunded mandate that our constituents pay for every month in their phone bills, the E-rate program, sometimes known as the "Gore Tax," because it has garnered the Vice President's support.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the intent of the "Gore Tax" is to ensure that every school and library is connected to the Internet. But the FCC pays for this program by getting mandatory contributions from phone companies and others. If you look at your phone bill, you will see that mandatory contribution passed on to you, the consumer, as part of the Universal Service Charge.

Mandatory contributions. Mr. Speaker, let us be honest. If it looks like a tax, it quacks like a tax, it is a tax. We can say that our annual "mandatory contributions" to the government are due on April 15th, but we know different.

I have a chart here that shows how it works. First the FCC forces this mandatory contribution on long distance phone companies and others; second, those companies make their massive contributions to the Universal Service Corporation here. That is currently capped at \$2.25 billion each year, this mandatory contribution.

Only here, only in government, only at the Federal Government, could we actually come up with these oxymoronic statements, that this is a mandatory contribution.

But what the Vice President and other E-rate supporters do not want you to know is that this is a hidden tax. Consumers are forced to pay this charge through their monthly phone bills. This is where the hidden tax is found, and I would like to eliminate it.

Mr. Speaker, Americans today are taxed at the highest levels in history. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office recently reported that Federal tax revenues have reached a peacetime record level of 20.5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is not just a hidden tax, it is also an unnecessary tax. I have some statistics here from the Congressional Research Service that came before the "Gore Tax" was created.

Now, remember this tax was put on, it was snuck through essentially in order to provide technological support and technology support for schools, in order to encourage them to get on to the Internet and to put computers in classrooms.

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But before this tax was ever passed, according to the Congressional Re-

search Service, the 1997 student-to-computer ratio in this country was 8-to-1. Also in 1997, 78 percent of all schools were connected to the Internet, remember, before this tax ever came into existence.

Mr. Speaker, the President has just asked for another \$766 million in his Department of Education's budget for education technology alone. That is three-quarters of \$1 billion, and I quote his own budget summary, "as a part of the President's proposal to connect all schools to the Internet and put a computer in every classroom." Mr. Speaker, this is the "Gore Tax," and what is this "Gore Tax" program? Is there not some duplication in a multibillion-dollar effort to put Internet in the schools?

In fact, there are over 20 Federal programs aimed toward this effort, not to mention hundreds of State and local private initiatives.

Last year, the Committee on Appropriations reported that the Department of Education cannot account for the money it now spends in education technology. They cannot explain where this money goes. In fact, the Committee on Appropriations said that it fears millions of dollars might go unspent each year.

Today, I am introducing the E-Rate Termination Act, and I would like to thank the 13 original cosponsors of this bill for recognizing the dire need for change. By eliminating this hidden tax, we can focus on honest and realistic ways to address our schools' and libraries' technological needs, and I ask for my colleagues' support.

PROTECTING AND PRESERVING MEDICARE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURR of North Carolina). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk a little bit about what the Republican agenda is this year. We have been saying BEST military. B for balancing in the budget, paying down the debt, responsible spending; E for excellence in education; S for saving Social Security; T for lowering taxes and having a strong military presence that we need in the world today.

I have with me a distinguished member of the Committee on Ways and Means, the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS) who has worked so long on protecting Medicare and working for lowering taxes, and also the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE), one of our distinguished freshman Members, and we were just going to talk about some of the things we hope to accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS).

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

One of the focal points obviously at the beginning of this, the 106th Congress, is the Medicare Commission which is scheduled to make its report, if we can get 11 of the 17 members to agree on a plan, in early March. I would tell the gentleman that the things that have taken place recently, primarily on the executive side of Washington, have made it immensely more difficult for us to try to come together.

In the context of trying to get 11 of 17 people who are very knowledgeable, who have been experienced, four of whom were appointed by the President, four by the Speaker of the House, the majority leader of the Senate, two by the minority leader of the Senate and minority leader of the House, to come to agreement is difficult in the best of times. But when the President, in his State of the Union message, pulled like a genie out of the bottle, I am willing to put \$700 billion on the table, and by the way, I will bring the drugs in, throwing a party, the difficulty of coming to agreement in the Medicare Commission was blurred. It sounded as though there was more money available than anyone thought, and that it is relatively simple to move prescription drugs into a Medicare solution.

The folks who are the participants in Medicare, the providers, the taxpayers, and the beneficiaries, all had a sigh of relief that the problem has been solved, when in fact, as we are now discovering, as Samuelson's excellent guest editorial in the Washington Post today spelled it out, that there was a lot more smoke and mirrors in the President's budget than anyone anticipated.

Just a couple of examples of the difficulty. When the President said that he was going to put \$700 billion on the table, that is not the case. When the President said we should have a prescription drug benefit in Medicare, everyone nods their head yes, and we are in agreement that that should occur. But what is not explained, and what most people do not realize, I would say to the gentleman from Georgia, is that 65 percent of the seniors on Medicare have some sort of prescription drug program. What we need to do is examine the 35 percent who do not and create a program that brings them into a protective structure to shelter them from the full cost of prescription drugs, without driving out those other 65 percent who do have a drug support program in some way.

It just seems to me that for the President to make the statements that he did in January and February, when we are on the verge of having to make an agreement in March, that advertently or inadvertently he has created a far more difficult problem for us than we had prior to what he considered helping statements. That is exactly the