the rights of the unborn. I plan on cosponsoring the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act again in this Congress and have recently added my name as a cosponsor to the Right to Life Act of 1999.

For my next letter, I would now like to address an issue that has been brought to my attention by 102 constituents in the form of postcards.

The issue of concern is private contracting for health care. The postcard reads, ''Dear Representative John Shimkus: The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 contains a provision (Section 4507) which prevents seniors from privately contracting for certain healthcare services with the doctor of their choice. This new law gives the bureaucracy even more control over seniors' healthcare and prevents them from getting all the care they need or want. I urge you to cosponsor and work for passage of legislation which will repeal this unfair and dangerous law.''

I would like to say that I am fully supportive of this position. In fact, I have already cosponsored legislation, H.R. 2497, the Medicare Beneficiary Freedom to Contract Act, in the 105th Congress, that would address your concerns. Unfortunately, H.R. 2497 was not brought up for a vote in the 105th Congress. However, I look forward to supporting this type of legislation once it is introduced in the 106th Congress.

The provision (Section 4507) which prevents seniors from private contracting was added to the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 under pressure from the administration. The President threatened to veto the entire budget agreement if we did not give in to the administration's demands. For example, if a healthcare provider such as a doctor chooses to privately contract with one patient, they could not accept Medicare assignment for any patient. Additionally, the provider must refrain from accepting any other Medicare patients, and submitting bills to Medicare on their behalf for a period of 2 years.

This provision is detrimental not only to providers but to those who want to contribute their own money to receive the services of their personal choice. This is a prime example of the Washington knows best mentality, the kind of thought which I have real problems with. Consumers, not bureaucrats, know best.

H.R. 2497 would have returned the right to individuals to be treated by a physician of their choice outside of Medicare when they are paying for that service entirely out of their own money.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me regarding this very important issue.

The issue of my third and final letter is taxation of the Internet. I have received over 900 letters, or shall I say e-mails, on this issue, and here is an example of one that was printed out for this period of time. Therefore, I have chosen a letter that I would answer the general premise of each letter.

Debbie Brown-Thompson of Edwardsville, wrote: As a taxpayer in your district, I would like to urge you to vote against paying Internet charges to the phone company in order to use the Internet. It is my understanding that the Internet was designed to make communicating with the rest of the world much easier. If we are forced to pay long distance charges for these local calls, the Internet will no longer be easier than other forms of communication.

There are also many children who use the Internet for school projects, and this may end the educational benefits of using the Internet for them as well. Please vote no on any Internet tax.

Not only would I like to address my response to Debbie, but I would also like to include Gene Ralston of Rushville, Charles Byars of Texico and Kim Lohman of Hillsboro, all of whom wrote similar letters addressing the Internet tax.

I share your concern that the growth and usage of the Internet may be stifled by costly charges, and I will fight any effort which attempts to do so.

Neither I, nor the Republican Congress, have any intention of increasing charges or taxes on the Internet. I serve on the Subcommittee on Telecommunications, Trade, and Consumer Protection which hears about all the exciting new things that are occurring in the technological field, and the thing that we will be fighting very fervently about is to make sure that this great new form of communication commerce will not be obstructed by taxation.

I have heard that news outlets have erroneously reported that Congress was considering charging long distance fees for going on-line.

In fact, the 105th Congress enacted a bill which I cosponsored called the Internet Tax Freedom Act, which established a moratorium on Internet taxation. The Internet Tax Freedom Act will protect against taxes on Internet access, prevent discriminatory taxation of electronic commerce and protect traditional commerce against the imposition of new tax liability if it merely happens to be facilitated over the Internet.

Mr. Speaker, the Federal Communications Commission has created a fact sheet to answer Members' questions regarding this issue. I recommend that they visit their web site at: www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common __ Carrier/Factsheets/nominute.html.

As a former teacher, I remember my lesson plans on how to contact Members of Congress, and in that lesson plan we talked about contacting them through the use of letters, and letters are a very great form. Letters can now be used on the Internet, as e-mail, and the thing that makes letters so important and that most members want to see are letters that are personal, are letters that have heart and meaning, soul searching, but also short and sweet and to the point.

So I want to thank my constituents who have been very helpful in making me understand the concerns of the 20th district, and I look forward to sharing their questions and my responses to them at another time throughout this year.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the special order of the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH).

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GARY MILLER of California). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. KOLBE (at the request of Mr. ARMEY) for today and tomorrow on account of attending his brother's funeral.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. ALLEN) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. FILNER, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. NORTON, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. FORD, Jr., for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BLUMENAUER, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. HERGER, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. NETHERCUTT, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. EMERSON, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. KNOLLENBERG, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. HULSHOF, for 5 minutes, on February 12.

Mr. SCARBOROUGH, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. SCHAFFER, for 5 minutes, today.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.