members in the dark. The budgeting process that brought us this bill at 3:30 a.m. must change. Congress needs to find a better way to fund its operations without jeopardizing funding for critical initiatives and programs by a process that is too partisan and deeply divided.

Even though I object to the process which brought us this bill, I will support its final passage because it contains a number of provisions which are absolutely essential for the people in my district. These provisions include relief for rural hospitals hit hard by the Balanced Budget Act of 1977 (BBA), access to local stations for rural satellite TV viewers, critical protections for dairy farmers, and the hiring of teachers and law enforcement officers.

Health care providers in rural East Texas have been hit exceptionally hard by the BBA changes. Many hospitals in East Texas receive 55-75% of revenue from Medicare. The budget provision includes an agreement that would give hospitals, nursing homes, home health care agencies and other health care providers relief from cuts in Medicare payments that was enacted under the 1997 Balanced Budget Act.

This agreement will provide an estimated $12.8 billion over five years in additional Medicare payments for hospitals, home health care agencies, managed care plans and other health providers. It also includes provisions targeted at small hospitals and rural hospitals.

In addition to a higher rate of reimbursement for these institutions, the bill allows them to increase the number of residency positions they are allowed to offer.

Hospital outpatient departments will also see relief. The agreement includes a provision stating that Congress never intended to impose a 5.7% cut in payments to hospital outpatient departments. This provision will restore these payments, reimbursing hospitals about $4.2 billion over five years. This is critical for the financial security of our rural hospitals in East Texas. Patients’ care options will be preserved with this provision, and the quality of care will be preserved.

The budget bill also contains important provisions which would allow satellite TV viewers access to local programming. Until now, satellite providers have been barred from transmitting the signals of local broadcast stations back to subscribers in the same local market. This legislation, however, contains important provisions of the Satellite Home View Act, which recently passed the House with overwhelming support.

In addition to allowing satellite carriers to transmit local broadcast signals back to subscribers in the same local market, this legislation would also eliminate the current 90-day waiting period before cable subscribers can switch to satellite service. These provisions are good news for satellite viewers who have been unfairly left deprived of access to local weather, news, and programming.

With regard to dairy, the agreement includes policy provisions that direct the USDA to implement its proposed “Option 1-A” Class 1 differential milk pricing structure. By doing so, the measure blocks portions of USDA’s proposed milk marketing orders reform plan (Option 1-B) and essentially preserves the status quo in milk pricing for Texas.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

This is a victory for Texas dairy farmers. If Option 1-B had been implemented, Texas dairy farmers would have lost $56 million in revenue and a significant share of their income. With this agreement, we are preventing that loss and preserving the East Texas dairy farm.

The budget also contains a number of important Democratic victories, including funding for 100,000 new teachers, after school programs, Head Start, school construction, and the COPS program. These victories also include extensions of important tax credits for research and development, the Work Incentive tax credit, Welfare to Work credit, and Alternative Minimum Tax relief for individuals.

This year we have also given our service men and women a pay raise and provided funding for increased workload at Red River Army Depot. Specifically, the FY00 budget appropriates $384 million for upgrading the Bradley Fighting Vehicle. Finally, this bill puts aside $147 billion for reining in the federal debt and helping ensure that future generations can share in the economic prosperity we are now experiencing as a nation.

Although I am pleased with the positive aspects of this bill, I am deeply disturbed by its most troubling provisions. These include an arbitrary across-the-board cut upon which Republicans have insisted. Instead of eliminating the irresponsible member earmarks that load-up this budget with unnecessary spending or cutting Member pay raises, Republicans have opted for a damaging, indiscriminate across-the-board cut. Moreover, they rely on accounting gimmicks to disguise the real spending in this bill, and tell us this budget won’t break the caps. This bill has not been scored, so we have no choice but to accept Republican claims that it won’t dip into the Social Security trust fund.

I find the Republicans’ failure to cut the Congressional pay raise particularly unconscionable. This bill would actually exempt the Congressional pay raise from the across-the-board cut. This provision is extremely upsetting, considering that the Congress twice voted against this exemption.

Republican tactics throughout the budget process have produced an imperfect bill. Their unwillingness to negotiate with Democrats from the beginning is the reason behind this 11th hour budget bill. Unfortunately, Republicans put off budget negotiations until the very last minute in favor of partisan rhetoric and have thereby prevented Congress from passing a Patients’ Bill of Rights, funding a Medicare prescription drug benefit for seniors, increasing the minimum wage for working Americans, and providing meaningful tax relief for families.

These realities make it especially difficult for me to cast my vote in favor of this bill. The most troubling consequence of this bill is the potentially detrimental effect of the across-the-board cut on veterans’ healthcare. I will vote for the Motion to Recommit for this reason, and for all the other reasons I have cited, in hopes that these problems can be addressed before final passage of the bill.

However, should the Motion to Recommit fail, I will support final passage because, although it is imperfect, this bill is a product of lengthy negotiations. I accept that negotiation requires compromise, and not everyone will agree on every aspect of a compromise. All in all, I support this bill because, despite its shortcomings, it is good news for the people of East Texas.

BERNARDO FORT-BRESCIA AND LAURINDA SPEAR INDUCTED TO THE INTERIOR DESIGN MAGAZINE HALL OF FAME

HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN OF FLORIDA IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, November 22, 1999

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Bernardo Fort-Brescia and his wife, Laurinda Spear, on being inducted as members of the 1999 Interior Design Magazine Hall of Fame.

In 1977, Bernardo and Laurinda, both graduates of Ivy League architectural schools, founded the Miami based Arquitectonica which has been making headlines with a brand of unconventional modernism that combines clarity and formal rigor with unusual daring in color and wit. The firm’s designs have won numerous awards from the American Institute of Architects and Progressive Architecture.

Bernardo and Laurinda have worked on many memorable designs, including the Miami City Ballet headquarters in Miami Beach, the American Airlines Arena in Miami, and the future Westin New York at Times Square on New York’s 42nd Street. These projects have been featured in many magazines and professional journals including Time, Newsweek, Domus, and Architectural Digest. Bernardo and Laurinda have lectured around the world and their work had been exhibited in many prestigious museums and galleries throughout the Western Hemisphere and Europe.

I urge my colleagues to join me in congratulating Bernardo Fort-Brescia, FAIA and Laurinda Spear, FAIA on their induction to the 1999 Interior Design Magazine Hall of Fame.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2116, VETERANS MILLENNIUM HEALTH CARE AND BENEFITS ACT

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH OF NEW JERSEY IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 16, 1999

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2116, the Veterans Millennium Health Care Act of 1996. As a conferee on this legislation, I am grateful the Senate accepted one particular provision, my proposal to add bronchiolo alveolar carcinoma to the Department of Veterans Affairs presumption list for radiogenic cancers.

For the last ten years, I have worked to add this lung cancer to the VA’s presumption list for service-connected veterans. During the 103rd and 105th Congresses, the House passed my legislation to add this cancer to the VA’s presumption list. This year, we have convinced our Senate colleagues of the need to put this provision into law because of the VA’s

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