I believe we should be doing everything we can to help Medicare beneficiaries improve access to the drugs they need but not through price controls. One of the easiest things that could be done right away is for the administration to move forward on regulation to expand Medicare Plus Choice plans. Because of the way the current Medicare managed care plans are paid, many areas, including portions of my district, do not have managed care plans available to them.

By simply enacting the Medicare Plus Choice program as part of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 that we passed, Congress sought to expand Medicare beneficiaries’ access to prescription drugs by allowing them to join HMOs that offer these benefits. Congress’ goal in the Balanced Budget Act was to extend to Medicare beneficiaries the same range of choices that exist for all working Americans. Choosing between competing health care plans provides greater promise than price controls, giving them greater access. It is better than telling the pharmaceutical companies that they have to meet a price.

Mr. Speaker, the administration should no longer delay in expanding access to these plans. There was a bipartisan commission that developed a proposal that is really worth more discussion. It said that we should figure out how Medicare beneficiaries can take advantage of the change in health care delivery benefiting every privately insured person, including Members of Congress. That is the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program. We have discount pharmaceutical drugs. Why not adopt a program like the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program, something that we all have, Mr. Speaker, and the President and the Senate?

So why are we talking about this? We should stop talking about socialized medicine and the age-old false hope of price controls that have never worked. Medicare beneficiaries need more from their Members of Congress than false promises of cheap drugs through price controls. We need to help them gain access to affordable prescriptions through insurance coverage and the truly effective price competition of an active marketplace. We also need to make sure that whatever reform we pass does not hurt those to whom we owe a great debt: veterans. Veterans should not be put at risk to give someone in this body a political win.

Mr. Speaker, I am certain we can find an answer that will help our Nation’s senior citizens while at the same time protecting our veterans.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. Accordingly (at 12 o’clock and 42 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PETRI) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Reverend James David Ford, D.D., offered the following prayer:

With gratefulness and praise we begin a new week imploring Your mercy upon us, O God, and seeking Your blessings. We especially pray for those who have committed themselves to the work of ending hostilities in our world, and we pray for all those who seek to alleviate suffering or hunger or loneliness. For all those who are involved in bringing food to the hungry, shelter for the homeless, a comforting word to those who are alone, we offer these words of thanksgiving and appreciation.

Bless, O God, those good people who in our own communities or in the world are agents of reconciliation and messengers of peace. For them we offer our prayer. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

Mr. GIBBONS, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1, rule I, I demand a vote on agreeing to the Speaker pro tempore’s approval of the Journal.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the Chair’s approval of the Journal.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8, rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. KUCINICH led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows: