

come to the United States. I realize how he must love Elian. What, if not fear, could keep a person from making a 30-minute trip to reclaim his son? And what might Elian's father fear if not the authoritarian Cuban government itself? Could we send the boy back to a climate that may be full of fear without at least a fair hearing in a family court," Sister Jeanne asks.

Some would discount that this fear exists. Some would question that the regime takes any action that would instill fear. No, that would not be, they say. But imagine how intense the fear must be, how horrific the oppression and subjugation must be in Cuba, that thousands upon thousands of mothers and fathers risk their lives to bring their children to freedom here in the United States. Imagine how the spirit of the Cuban people is strangled by the Castro regime that they are driven to such desperate measures.

Imagine not being able to go to church or to turn to any religious leader for guidance or support because you would be arrested and interrogated. Where would those be who would doubt that there is fear in Cuba? What would they say to the dissidents who are persecuted because they want human rights, or to the political prisoners because they want freedom and democracy for Cuba? What would they say to the Cuban mothers and fathers who must relinquish control of their children's upbringing and education and leave it to the Castro regime, a regime which teaches children to read using books such as these:

This one, for example, is used to teach Elian and his classmates and it says, "G" is for guerrilla. It also includes songs such as the ones where the children pledge their devotion to Castro, to Che Guevara, and to other Cuban revolutionary leaders. This one, for example, says, "I want to be like him. I could be like him. I will have to be like him. Like whom," it says. "Like Che."

Is this the environment that Elian should be returned to without so much as an opportunity to have him speak and express his desires?

I ask that my colleagues search their consciences and let God guide their steps as they consider this issue.

□ 1730

URGING REPUBLICAN MEMBERS TO SIGN DISCHARGE PETITION ON H.R. 664, THE PRESCRIPTION DRUG FAIRNESS FOR SENIORS ACT

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

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, Congress is back in session. We heard from the President the other night, and he laid

out an agenda for this country of priorities that we need to work on during the course of this year. Many of those priorities in fact are the unfinished business of last year, when we did not accomplish all that we might have.

The issue that I want to address this evening has to do with the high cost of prescription drugs for our seniors, because there is a problem that in the past year has only become much worse.

Two years ago, in 1998, I first had a study done in my district that showed that seniors on average pay twice as much for their prescription medications as the drug companies' preferred customers. Those preferred customers are HMOs, hospitals, and the Federal government itself, which purchases drugs for Medicaid and for the Veterans Administration.

In October of 1998, we released a second study in the first District of Maine. That study showed that people in Maine pay 72 percent more than Canadians and 102 percent more than Mexicans for the same drug in the same quantity from the same manufacturer.

That price discrimination is going on all over the country. We have now had over 150 different studies, one study or the other demonstrating this price discrimination by the pharmaceutical industry against those who do not have insurance for their prescription drugs.

Seniors make up 12 percent of the population, but they buy one-third of all prescription medications. Seniors, 37 percent of them have no coverage at all for their prescription medications. About 8 percent have prescription drug coverage through a MediGap policy, but those Medigap policies are very limited in terms of their benefits. Often they are capped out at \$1,000 or \$1,500 per year. Often the policies cost more than the benefit that they provide.

About 8 percent of people in this country have prescription drug coverage through an HMO. Medicare beneficiaries have HMO coverage. But if we read the news about what is happening to HMOs providing coverage under Medicare, some of them are dropping coverage in areas entirely because it is not profitable. Most of them are lowering the cap that they provide for a benefit on prescription drugs, and most of them are increasing the premiums that they are asking people to pay.

So HMOs under Medicare are no way to provide secure, reliable coverage for prescription drugs. The fact is that the industry charges whatever the market will bear for prescription drugs, and they give discounts to big customers, to favored customers, they give discounts to Canadians and Mexicans and Europeans, but seniors in this country pay the highest prices in the world.

The fact is, the bottom line is that the most profitable industry in the country is charging the highest prices

in the world to people who can least afford it, including our seniors.

The bill that I introduced last year, H.R. 664, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act, would deal with this problem by eliminating the price discrimination. The bill is very simple. It allows the government to negotiate lower prices for people who are on Medicare, people who are already in a Federal health care plan. It is called Medicare. It works, but it does not have prescription drug coverage, and it needs to.

All my bill would do is allow pharmacies to buy drugs for Medicare beneficiaries at the best price given to the Federal government, either the price given to the Veterans Administration or the price paid by Medicaid.

I thought that this bill would attract Members of the other side of the aisle when they understood it was a bill that created no new bureaucracy, it involved no significant amount of expenditure by the Federal government, and it would provide a discount of up to 40 percent for seniors in this country who really need the help and need it now.

But the truth is that though we have 140 Democratic cosponsors of this legislation, not one Republican, not one has seen fit to step up and cosponsor this legislation.

I grant that this is a battle. The pharmaceutical industry does not like this bill. The pharmaceutical industry is running TV ads all across the country touting what a wonderful, warm, and fuzzy industry it is, and how they do research and development that is important for the American people. About that, they are right. But what they are trying to do is block the President's prescription drug benefit plan. They are trying to block the progress that we are making in getting a discount for Medicare beneficiaries.

This is a huge battle. On this battle, the Democrats are lining up, taking on the pharmaceutical industry. We are going to be introducing a discharge petition to bring this bill to the floor next week. We would like to have some Republican support. I certainly hope at some point we will get it.

WISHING A HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO GLENYS BURQUIST

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

Mr. NETHERCUTT. Mr. Speaker, February 3 marked a special day for a person close to my heart, for it was the 90th birthday of a wonderful woman with whom my family had a long association of close to 60 years. Her name is Glenys Burquist, and she was a legal secretary to my late father for 36 years, and a secretary to me for 18