

the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) and her chief of staff, Jim Wilson.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

(Mr. EHLERS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to follow up on the comments made by the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. SMITH, and also related to comments I made a few moments ago about the importance of improving math and science education in this country.

As I mentioned in my previous comments, we are enjoying an immense economic boom at this time, much of which is due to the results of science and technology. In particular, it is due to the research which has been done over the past 50 years.

That is why the work of the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is so important, because if we wish to maintain a good economy, if we wish to have our children have a good economy, we must make the same investment in scientific research today that our parents and grandparents made 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago, and which we are enjoying the fruits of today.

It is extremely important that we continue that research effort to improve the health, the lives, and the freedoms not only in our Nation, but of peoples throughout the entire planet.

I commend the gentleman from Michigan for his work. I hope this Congress will continue to show a willingness to fund scientific research and maintain our leadership among the nations of this planet.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

WHAT IS BEHIND OPPOSITION TO THE DEMOCRATS' MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, earlier this year a confidential document prepared for House Republicans somehow found its way into the public realm.

It was not big news at the time, just some talking points prepared by Republican polling firms on the Democrats' Medicare prescription drug plan.

According to their analysis, one way to create opposition to the Democratic

plan is to call it a one-size-fits-all plan or a big government plan.

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One cannot blame the public for bristling at those phrases. I do not know anyone who likes big government for big government's sake. However, one can blame politicians for exploiting those terms instead of confronting the fundamental differences between the Democratic and Republican prescription drug plans. One can blame the drug companies and the chamber of commerce for spending \$40 million already and promises of another \$40 million on phony groups on television such as Citizens for Better Medicare.

The Democrats plan would add an optional drug benefit to Medicare. The Republican plan, the drug company plan, would bypass Medicare and subsidize private, stand-alone insurance plans.

So is the Democrats' Medicare prescription drug coverage a one-size-fits-all program as the Republicans and the prescription drug companies tell us? I do not think so.

It is difficult to conceive of a program offering more choice than Medicare. The Medicare program covers medically necessary care and services. Beneficiaries can see the health care professional and go to the facility of their choice.

Similarly, under the proposed drug benefit, enrollees can go to the pharmacy of their choice. FDA-approved medications prescribed by a physician would be covered under the Democrats' Medicare prescription drug plan.

Given this level of flexibility, how would a legion of new private health plans enhance the beneficiary's choice in any way that matters? It is more likely that the Republican plan, the prescription drug company plan, like any other managed care product, would restrict choice and add to the insurance and drug company's bottom lines.

Medicare is a single plan that treats all beneficiaries equally, provides maximum choice and maximum access for patients and doctors.

The Democrats' prescription drug coverage proposal embraces the same principle. Is that a one-size-fits-all program?

Under the Republican prescription drug proposal, under the drug companies' plan, Medicare beneficiaries would have to choose among private stand-alone insurance company prescription drug plans. They say that enables seniors to tailor their prescription drug coverage to their particular needs.

None of these private plans, however, will provide more choice to the Democrats' plan than the Medicare plan in terms of which medications are covered since the Democrats' plan covers all Medicare doctor-prescribed medications. None of these private plans could

provide a broader choice of pharmacy since the Democrats' plan does not restrict access to pharmacies.

Under the Republican plan, under the prescription drug company plan, it appears that choice is actually code for "wealth." Higher-income seniors could, in fact, afford a decent prescription drug plan, one with the same level of coverage as would be available to all beneficiaries under the Democrats' Medicare plan. Lower-income enrollees, however, would be relegated to restrictive alternatives. Some choice.

Is the Democrats' prescription drug coverage plan a big government program as the Republicans and the prescription drug companies' executives tell us? Hardly.

Medicare is a Federal Government program with the beneficiary population of 39 million. It is definitely big. But Medicare is also one of the most enduring popular public programs in the Nation's history. Medicare far outranks both employer-sponsored and individually purchased private insurance as a trusted source of health care coverage.

So when opponents of the Democrats' prescription coverage plan berate it for being one size fits all or big government, they, in fact, are berating Medicare itself.

In fact, the Republican prescription drug proposal, the plan from the big drug companies, which ignore Medicare to establish new private insurance policies, is an insult to the Medicare program. Their plan pays homage to those Members of Congress who favor privatizing Medicare. Parenthetically, I have to say I have not yet met anyone outside of Washington who wants to privatize Medicare.

It is no coincidence that the only way a Medicare beneficiary could avoid carrying multiple health insurance policies under the Republican plan, under the prescription drug company plan, is to join a private-managed Medicare-managed care plan.

As Congress and the presidential candidates debate the merits of competing prescription drug coverage proposals, watch for allegations to be thrown around like one size fits all and big government program. Because when applied to insurance coverage offering maximum choice in matters that matter, choice of provider access to medically-necessary care, which is what Medicare is all about, those, those threats, those accusations of one size fits all and big government program, those terms simply fall flat.

Bear in mind that more than the structure of prescription drug benefit is at stake. The future of Medicare hangs in the balance.